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This Volume

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ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
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PREFACE.

—o—

SOMETIME ago I wrote and published, in a paper entitled "The Iliad and Odyssey of India," the following passages:—"There exist two colossal, two unparalleled epic poems in the sacred language of India—the Mahâbhârata and the Râmâyana—which were not known to Europe, even by name, till Sir William Jones announced their existence; and one of which (the larger) since his time has been made public only by fragments, by mere specimens, bearing to those vast treasures of Sanskrit literature such small proportion as cabinet samples of ore have to the riches of a silver mine. Yet these most remarkable poems contain almost all the history of

ancient India, so far as it can be recovered; together with such inexhaustible details of its political, social, and religious life, that the antique Hindoo world really stands epitomised in them. The Old Testament is not more interwoven with the Jewish race, nor the New Testament with the civilization of Christendom, nor the Koran with the records and destinies of Islam, than these two Sanskrit poems with that unchanging and teeming population which Her Majesty rules as Empress of Hindostan. The stories, songs, and ballads; the histories and genealogies; the nursery tales and religious discourses; the art, the learning, the philosophy, the creeds, the moralities, the modes of thought, the very phrases, sayings, turns of expression, and daily ideas of the Hindoo people, are taken from these poems. Their children and their wives are named out of them; so are their cities, temples, streets, and cattle. They have constituted the library, the newspaper, and the Bible, generation after generation, for all the

succeeding and countless millions of Hindoo people; and it replaces patriotism with that race and stands in stead of nationality to possess these two precious and inexhaustible books, and to drink from them as from mighty and overflowing rivers. The value ascribed in Hindostan to these two little-known epics has transcended all literary standards established here. They are personified, worshipped, and cited as being something divine. To read or even listen to them is thought by the devout Hindoo sufficiently meritorious to bring prosperity to his household here and happiness in the next world. They are held also to give wealth to the poor, health to the sick, wisdom to the ignorant; and the recitation of certain parvas and shlokes in them can fill the household of the barren, it is believed, with children. A concluding passage of the great poem says—

'The reading of this Mahá-Bhárata destroys all sin and produces virtue; so much so, that the pronunciation of a single shloka is sufficient to wipe away much guilt. This

Mahá-Bhárata contains the history of the gods, of the Rishis in heaven and those on earth, of the Gandharvas and the Rákshasas. It also contains the life and actions of the one God, holy, immutable, and true, who is Krishna, who is the creator and the ruler of this universe—who is seeking the welfare of his creation by means of his incomparable and indestructible power; whose actions are celebrated by all sages; who has bound human beings in a chain, of which one end is life and the other death; on whom the Rishis meditate, and a knowledge of whom imparts unalloyed happiness to their hearts, and for whose gratification and favour all the daily devotions are performed by all worshippers. If a man reads the Mahá-Bhárata and has faith in its doctrines, he is free from all sin, and ascends to heaven after his death.'"

The present volume contains (besides the two Parvas from my "Indian Poetry") such translations as I have from time to time made out of this prodigious epic; which is sevenfold greater in bulk than the Iliad and Odyssey taken together. The stories here extracted are new to English literature, with the exception of a few passages of the "Sâvitrî" and the "Nala and Damayantî," which was long ago most faithfully rendered by Dean Milman, the version being published side

by side with a clear and excellent Sanskrit text edited by Professor Monier Williams, C.I.E. But that presentation of the beautiful and brilliant legend, with all its conspicuous merits, seems better adapted to aid the student than adequately to reproduce the swift march of narrative and old-world charm of the Indian tale, which I also have therefore ventured to transcribe, with all deference and gratitude to my predecessors.

I believe certain portions of the mighty Poem which here appear, and many other episodes, to be of far greater antiquity than has been ascribed to the Mahábhárata generally. Doubtless, the "two hundred and twenty thousand lines" of the entire compilation contain in many places little and large additions and corrections interpolated in Brahmanic or post-Buddhistic times; and he who ever so slightly explores this epical ocean, will indeed perceive defects, excrescences, differences, and breaks of artistic style and structure. But in the simpler and nobler

sections, the Sanskrit verse (ofttimes as musical and highly-wrought as Homer's own Greek), bears testimony, I think,—by evidence too long and recondite for citation here,—to an origin anterior to writing, anterior to Purânic theology, anterior to Homer, perhaps even to Moses.

EDWIN ARNOLD, C.S.I.

LONDON, *August* 1883.

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"The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
But in another country—as he said—
Bore a bright golden flower,—if not in this soil."

—MILTON'S *Comus*.

SÂVITRÎ;

OR,

LOVE AND DEATH.

—o—

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahábhárata; line 16,616, Calcutta 4to edition.]

"I MOURN not for myself," quoth Yudhisthir,
"Nor for my hero-brothers; but because
Draupadî hath been taken from us now:
Never was seen or known another such
As queenly, true, and faithful to her vows,
As Draupadî."

Then said Markandya:
"Wilt thou hear, Prince, of such another soul,
Wherein the nobleness of Draupadî
Dwelt, of old days,—the Princess Sâvitrî?

THERE was a Raja, pious-minded, just—
King of the Madras—valiant, wise, and true;
Victorious over sense, a worshipper;
Liberal in giving, prudent, dear alike
To peasant and to townsman; one whose joy
Lived in the weal of all men—Aśwapati—
Patient, and free of any woe, he reigned,
Save that his manhood passing, left him lone,
A childless lord: for this he grieved; for this
Heavy observances he underwent,
Subduing needs of flesh, and oftentimes
Making high sacrifice to Sâvitrî;
While, for all food, at each sixth watch he took
A little measured dole; and this he did
Through sixteen years (most excellent of kings!)
Till, at the last, divinest Sâvitrî
Grew well content, and, taking shining shape,
Rose through the flames of sacrifice and showed
Unto that Prince her heavenly countenance.
"Raja!" the Goddess said—the Gift-bringer—
"Thy piety, thy purity, thy fasts,

The largesse of thy hands, thy heart's wide love,
Thy strength of faith, have pleased me. Choose some boon;
Thy dearest wish, monarch of Madra, ask;
It is not meet such merit go in vain."

The Raja answered: "Goddess! for the sake
Of children I did bear my heavy vows:
If thou art well content, grant me, I pray,
Fair babes, continuers of my royal line;
This is the boon I choose, obeying law;
For—say the holy seers—the first great law
Is that a man leave seed."

The Goddess said:
"I knew thine answer, Raja, ere it came;
And He, the Maker of all, hath heard my word
That this might be. The Self-existent One
Consenteth: born there shall be unto thee
A girl more sweet than any eyes have seen;
There is not found on earth so fair a maid:
I, that rejoice in the Great Father's will,
Know this and tell thee."

"Ah! so may it be!"
The Raja cried, once and again; and she,
The goddess, smiled again, and vanished so;
While Aśwapati to his palace went.
There dwelled he, doing justice to all folk;
Till, when the hour was good, the wise king lay
With her that was his first and fairest wife,
And she conceived a girl—(a girl, my liege!
Better than many boys)—which wonder grew
In darkness, as the moon among the stars
Grows from a ring of silver to a round
In the month's waxing days,—and, when time came,
The queen a daughter bore, with lotus eyes,
Lovely of mould. Joyous, that Raja made
The birth-feast; and because the fair gift fell
From Sâvitrî the goddess, and because
It was her day of sacrifice, they gave
The name of "Sâvitrî" unto the child.

In grace and beauty grew the maid, as if
Lakshmi's own self had taken woman's form;
And when swift years her blossomed youth made ripe,

Like to an image of dark gold she seemed,
Gleaming, with waist so fine and breasts so deep,
And limbs so rounded. When she moved, all eyes
Gazed after her, as though an Apsarâ
Had lighted out of Swarga. Not one dared,
Of all the noblest lords, to ask for wife
That miracle, with eyes purple and soft
As lotus-petals, that pure perfect maid,
Whose face shed heavenly light where she did go.

Once she had fasted, laved her head, and bowed
Before the shrine of Agni,—as is meet,—
And sacrificed, and spoken what is set
Unto the Brahmans, taking at their hands
The unconsumèd offerings, and so passed
Into her father's presence, bright as Śri,
If Śri were woman!—Meekly at his feet
She laid the blossoms; meekly bent her head,
Folded her palms, and stood, radiant with youth,
Beside the Raja. He, beholding her
Come to her growth, and thus divinely fair,
Yet sued of none, was grieved at heart and spake:

"Daughter! 'tis time we wed thee; but none comes
Asking thee; therefore thou thyself some youth
Choose for thy lord, a virtuous prince: whoso
Is dear to thee he shall be dear to me;
For this the rule is by the sages taught—
Hear what is spoken, noble maid!—'That sire
Who giveth not his child in marriage
Is blamable; and blamable that king
Who weddeth not; and blamable that son,
Who, when his father dieth, guardeth not
His mother.' Heeding this," the Raja said,
"Haste thee to choose; and so choose that I bear
No guilt, dear child! before th' all-seeing gods."

Thus spake he; from the royal presence then
Elders and ministers dismissing. She,
Sweet Sâvitrî, low-lying at his feet,
With soft shame heard her father, and obeyed.
Then on a bright car mounting, companied
By ministers and sages, Sâvitrî
Journeyed through groves and pleasant woodland towns
Where pious princes dwelled; in every spot

Paying meet homage at the Brahmans feet;
And so from forest unto forest passed,
In all the Tirthas making offerings:
Thus did the Princess visit place by place.

THE King of Madra sate among his lords
With Narada beside him, counselling,
When (Son of Bhârat!) entèred Sâvitrî,
From passing through each haunt and hermitage
Returning with those sages. At the sight
Of Narad seated by the Raja's side
Humbly she touched the earth before their feet
With bended forehead.

Then spake Narada:
"Whence cometh thy fair child? and wherefore, King,
Being so ripe in beauty, giv'st thou not
The Princess to a husband?"

'Ev'n for that
She journeyed," quoth the Raja: "being come,

Hear for thyself, great Rishi! what high lord
My daughter chooseth." Then, being bid to speak
Of Narad and the Raja, Sâvitrî
Softly said this: "In Chalva reigned a prince
Lordly and just, Dyumutsena named,
Blind, and his only son not come to age!
And this sad king an enemy betrayed,
Abusing his infirmity, whereby
Of throne and kingdom was that king bereft;
And, with his queen and son, a banished man,
He fled into the wood, and 'neath its shades
A life of holiness doth daily lead.
This Raja's son, born in the court, but bred
'Midst forest peace, royal of blood, and named
Prince Satyavân,—to him my choice is given."

"Aho!" cried Narad; "evil is this choice
Which Sâvitrî hath made, who, knowing not,
Doth name the noble Satyavân her lord;
For noble is the Prince, sprung of a pair
So just and faithful found in word and deed,
The Brahmans styled him "Truth-born" at his birth.

Horses he loved, and oftentimes would mould
Coursers of clay, or paint them on the wall,
Wherefore 'Chitraśwa' was he also called."

Then spake the king: "By this he shall have grown,
Being of so fair birth, either a prince
Of valour, or a wise and patient saint!"

Quoth Narad: "Like the sun is Satyavân
For grace and glory; like Vrihaspati
For counsel; like Mahendra's self for might;
And hath the patience of the all-bearing earth."

"Is he a liberal giver?" asked the King;
"Loveth he virtue? wears he noble airs?
Goeth he like a prince, with sweet, proud looks?"

"He is as glad to give, if he hath store,
As Rantideva," Narada replied;
"Pious he is, and true as Shivi was,
The son of Usinara; fair of form
(Yayâti was not fairer), sweet of looks
(The Aświns not more gracious), gallant, kind,

Reverent, self-governed, gentle, equitable,
Modest, and constant. Justice lives in him,
And honour guides. Those who do love a man
Praise him for manhood; they that seek a saint
Laud him for purity and passions tamed."

"A prince thou showest me," the Raja said,
"All virtues owning! tell me of some faults,
If fault he hath."

"None lives," quoth Narada,
"But some fault mingles with his qualities;
And Satyavân bears that he cannot mend.
The blot which spoils his brightness, the defect
Forbidding yonder Prince, Raja, is this,
'Tis fated he shall die after a year!
Count from to-day one year, he perisheth!"

"My Sâvitrî!" the King cried, "go, dear child!
Some other husband choose. This hath one fault,
But huge it is, and mars all nobleness:
At the year's end he dies;—'tis Narad's word,
Whom the gods teach!"

But Sâvitrî replied:

"Once falls a heritage; once a maid yields
Her maidenhood; once doth a father say
'Choose, I abide thy choice;'—These three things done
Are done for ever. Be my Prince to live
A year or many years; be he so great
As Narada hath said, or less than this;
Once have I chosen him, and choose not twice!
My heart resolved, my mouth hath spoken it,
My hand shall execute:—This is my mind!"

Quoth Narad, "Yea, her mind is fixed, O King!
And none will turn her from this path of truth.
Also the virtues of Prince Satyavân
Shall in no other man be found. Give thou
Thy child to him; I gainsay not."

Therewith
The Raja sighed: "Nay, that which must be, must.
She speaketh sooth; and I will give my child,
Since thou our Guru art."

Narada said:

"Free be the gift of thy fair daughter, then!
May happiness yet light!—Raja, I go!"

So went that sage, returning to his place;
And the King bade the nuptials be prepared.

HE bade that all things be prepared,—the robes,
The golden cups; and summoned priest and sage,
Brahman, and Rity-yaj, and Purohit;
And on a day named fortunate set forth
With Sâvitrî. In the mid-wood they found
Dyumutsena's sylvan court: the King,
Alighting, paced with slow steps to the spot
Where sate the blind lord underneath a Sâl,
His mat woven of Kuśa grass. Then passed
Due salutations; worship, as is meet;—
All courteously the Raja spake his name
All courteously the blind King gave to him
Earth, and a seat, and water in a jar;

Then asked, "What, Maharaja! bringeth thee?"
And Aśwapati, answering, told him all;—
With eyes fixed full upon Prince Satyavân
He spake:—"This is my daughter Sâvitrî;
Take her from me to be wife of thy son,
According to the law; thou knowest the law."
Dyumutsena said: "Forced from our throne,
Wood-dwellers, hermits, keeping state no more,
We follow right, and how would right be done
If this most lovely lady we should house
Here in our woods, unfitting home for her?"
Answered the Raja: "Grief and joy we know,
And what is real and seeming, she and I;
Nor fits this fear with our unshaken minds.
Deny thou not the prayer of him who bows
In friendliness before thee; put not by
His wish who comes well-minded unto thee!
Thy stateless state is noble; thou and I
Are of one rank; take then this maid of mine
To be thy daughter, since she chooses me
Thy Satyavân for son."

The blind Lord spake:
"It was of old my wish to grow akin,
Raja! with thee, by marriage of our blood;
But ever have I answered to myself,
'Nay! for thy realm is lost; forego this hope!'
Yet now, so let it be, since so thou wilt;
My welcome guest thou art; thy will is mine!"

Then gathered in the forest all those priests,
And with due rites the royal houses bound
By nuptial tie. And when the Raja saw
His daughter, as befits a princess, wed,
Home went he glad. And glad was Satyavân
Winning that beauteous wife, with all gifts rich;
And she rejoiced to be the wife to him,
So chosen of her soul. But when her sire
Departed, from her neck and arms she stripped
Jewels and gold, and o'er her radiant form
Folded the robe of bark and yellow cloth
Which hermits use; and all hearts did she gain
By gentle actions, soft self-government,
Patience and peace. The queen had joy of her

For tender services and mindful cares;
The blind king took delight to know her days
So holy and her wise words so restrained;
And with her lord in sweet converse she lived,
Gracious and loving, dutiful and dear.

But while in the deep forest softly flowed
This quiet life of love and holiness
The swift moons sped; and always in the heart
Of Sâvitrî by day and night there dwelt
The words of Narada—those dreadful words!

NOW when the pleasant days were passed which brought
The day of doom, and Satyavân must die;
(For hour by hour the Princess counted them,
Keeping the words of Narada in heart),
Bethinking on the fourth noon he should die,
She set herself to make the "Threefold Fast,"
Three days and nights foregoing food and sleep;
Which when the King Dyumutsena heard,
Sorrowful he arose and spake her thus:

"Daughter! a heavy task thou takest on;
Hardly the saintliest soul might such abide."
But Sâvitrî gave answer: "Have no heed;
What I do set myself I will perform;
The vow is made, and I shall keep the vow."
"If it be made," quoth he, "it must be kept;
We cannot bid thee break thy word, once given."
With that the King forbade not, and she sate
Still, as though carved of wood, three days and nights.
But when the third night waned, and brought the day
Whereon her lord must die, she rose betimes,
Made offering on the altar-flames, and sang
Softly the morning prayers; then, with clasped palms
Laid o'er her bosom, meekly came to greet
The King and Queen, and lowlily salute
The grey-haired Brahmans. Thereupon those saints—
Resident in the woods—made answer mild
Unto the Princess: "Be it well with thee,
And with thy lord, for these good deeds of thine!"
"May it be well!" she answered; in her heart
Full mournfully that hour of fate awaiting
Foretold of Narad.

Then they said to her:
"Daughter! thy vow is kept. Come now and eat."
But Sâvitrî replied: "When the sun sinks
This evening, I will eat: that is my vow."

So, when they could not change her, afterward
Came Satyavân the Prince, bound for the woods,
An axe upon his shoulder; unto whom
Wistfully spake the Princess: "Dearest Lord!
Go not alone to-day; let me come, too;
I cannot be apart from thee to-day."

"Why not to-day?" quoth Satyavân. "The wood
Is strange to thee, belovëd, and its paths
Rough for thy tender feet; besides, with fast
Thy soft limbs faint; how canst thou walk with me?"

"I am not weak nor weary," she replied,
"And I can walk. Say me not nay, sweet Lord!
I have so great a heart to go with thee."

"If thou hast such good heart," answered the Prince,

"I shall say yea, but first entreat the leave
Of those we reverence, lest a wrong be done."

So, pure and dutiful, she sought that place
Where sat the King and Queen, and bending low,
Murmured request: "My husband goeth straight
To the great forest, gathering fruits and flowers:
I pray your leave that I may be with him.
To make the Agnihôtra sacrifice
Fetcheth he those, and will not be gainsaid,
But surely goeth. Let me go! A year
Hath rolled since I did fare from the hermitage
To see our groves in bloom. I have much will
To see them now."

The old King gently said:
"In sooth it is a year since she was given
To be our son's wife, and I mind me not
Of any boon the loving heart hath asked,
Nor any one untimely word she spake;
Let it be as she prayeth. Go, my child!
Have care of Satyavân, and take thy way."

So, being permitted of them both, she went,
That beauteous lady, at her husband's side,
With aching heart, albeit her face was bright.
Flower-laden trees her large eyes lighted on,
Green glades where pea-fowl sported, crystal streams,
And soaring hills whose green sides burned with bloom,
Which oft the Prince would bid her gaze upon;
But she as oft turned those great eyes from them
To look on him, her husband, who must die,
(For always in her heart were Narad's words);
And so she walked behind him, guarding him,
Bethinking at what hour her lord must die;
Her true heart torn in twain, one half to him
Close-cleaving, one half watching if Death come.

THEN, having reached where woodland fruits did grow,
They gathered those, and filled a basket full;
And afterwards the Prince plied hard his axe
Cutting the sacred fuel. Presently
There crept a pang upon him, a fierce throe
Burned through his brows, and, all a-sweat, he came
Feebly to Sâvitrî, and moaned: "O wife!

I am thus suddenly too weak for work;
My veins throb, Sâvitrî! my blood runs fire;
It is as if a threefold fork were plunged
Into my brain. Let me lie down, fair love!
Indeed, I cannot stand upon my feet."

Thereon, that noble lady, hastening near,
Stayed him, that would have fallen, with quick arms;
And, sitting on the earth, laid her lord's head
Tenderly in her lap. So bent she, mute,
Fanning his face, and thinking 'twas the day—
The hour—which Narad spake—the sure-fixed date
Of dreadful end—when lo! before her rose
A shade majestic. Red his garments were,
His body vast and dark; like fiery suns
The eye which burned beneath his forehead-cloth;
Armed was he with a noose, awful of mien.
This Form tremendous stood by Satyavân,
Fixing its gaze upon him. At the sight
The fearful Princess started to her feet—
Heedfully laying on the grass his head—
Upstarted she with beating heart, and joined

Her palms for supplication, and spake thus
In accents tremulous: "Thou seem'st some god!
Thy mien is more than mortal; make me know
What god thou art, and what thy purpose here."

And Yama said (the dreadful God of Death):
"Thou art a faithful wife, O Sâvitrî!
True to thy vows, pious, and dutiful,
Therefore I answer thee. Yama I am!
This Prince, thy lord, lieth at point to die;
Him will I straightway bind and bear from life;
This is my office, and for this I come."

Then Sâvitrî spake sadly: "It is taught
Thy messengers are sent to fetch the dying;
Why is it, Mightiest! thou art come thyself?"

In pity of her love, the Pitiless
Answered—the King of all the Dead replied:
"This was a prince unparalleled, thy lord;
Virtuous as fair, a sea of goodly gifts,
Not to be summoned by a meaner voice
Than Yama's own: therefore is Yama come!"

With that the gloomy god fitted his noose,
And forced forth from the Prince the soul of him—
Subtile, a thumb in length—which being reft,
Breath stayed, blood stopped, the body's grace was gone,
And all life's warmth to stony coldness turned.
Then binding it, the Silent Presence bore
Satyavân's soul away toward the south.

But Sâvitrî the Princess followed him;
Being so bold in wifely purity,
So holy by her love, and so upheld,
She followed him.

Presently Yama turned.
"Go back!" quoth he, "pay him the funeral dues.
Enough, O Sâvitrî! is wrought for love;
Go back! too far already hast thou come!"

Then Sâvitrî made answer: "I must go
Where my lord goes, or where my lord is borne;
Nought other is my duty. Nay, I think,
By reason of my vows, my services

Done to the Gurus, and my faultless love,
Grant but thy grace, I shall unhindered go.
The Sages teach that to walk seven steps
One with another maketh good men friends;
Beseech thee, let me say a verse to thee:

Be master of thyself if thou wilt be
Servant of Duty. Such as thou shalt see
Not self-subduing do no deeds of good
In youth or age, in household or in wood.
But wise men know that Virtue is best bliss,
And all by some one way may reach to this.
It needs not men should pass through orders four
To come to Knowledge: doing right is more
Than any learning; therefore sages say,
Best and most excellent is Virtue's way."

Spake Yama then: "Return!—yet am I moved
By those soft words: justly their accents fell,
And sweet and reasonable was their sense.
See now, thou faultless one!—except this life

I bear away, ask any boon from me;
It shall not be denied."

Sâvitrî said:

"Let then, the King, my husband's father, have
His eyesight back; and be his strength restored;
And let him live anew, strong as the sun."

"I give this gift," Yama replied; "thy wish,
Blameless! shall be fulfilled. But now go back!
Already art thou wearied, and our road
Is hard and long. Turn back! lest thou too die."

The Princess answered: "Weary am I not,
So I walk nigh my lord. Where he is borne
Thither wend I. Most mighty of the gods!
I follow wheresoe'er thou takest him:
I know a verse on this, if thou wouldst hear:

There is nought better than to be
With noble souls in company;
There is naught dearer than to wend
With good friends faithful to the end.

This is the love whose fruit is sweet,
Therefore to bide therein is meet."

Spake Yama, smiling: "Beautiful! thy words
Delight me; they are excellent, and teach
Wisdom unto the wise, singing soft truth.
Look now! except the life of Satyavân,
Ask yet another—any—boon from me."

Sâvitrî said: "Let, then, the pious King,
My husband's father, who hath lost his throne,
Have back the Râj, and let him rule his realm
In happy righteousness. This boon I ask."

"He shall have back the throne," Yama replied;
"And he shall reign in righteousness: these things
Will surely fall. But now, gaining thy wish,
Return anon: so shalt thou 'scape much ill."

"Ah, awful god! who holdst the world in leash,"
The Princess said, "restraining evil men,
And leading good men—ev'n unconscious—there
Where they attain: hear yet these famous words:

The constant virtues of the good are tenderness and love
To all that lives; in earth, air, sea; great, small,
below, above;
Compassionate of heart, they keep a gentle thought for
each;
Kind in their actions, mild in will, and pitiful of speech.
Who pitieth not, he hath not faith; full many an one
so lives;
But when an enemy seeks help, the good man gladly
gives."

"As water to the thirsting," Yama said,
"Princess! thy words melodious are to me.
Except the life of Satyavân thy lord,
Ask one boon yet again, for I will grant."

Answer made Sâvitrî: "The King my sire
Hath no male child. Let him see many sons
Begotten of his body, who may keep
The royal line long regnant. This I ask."

"So it shall be!" the Lord of death replied;
"A hundred fair preservers of his race

Thy sire shall boast. But this wish being won,
Return, dear Princess! thou hast come too far."

"It is not far for me," quoth Sâvitrî,
Since I am near my husband; nay, my heart
Is set to go as far as to the end.
But hear these other verses, if thou wilt:

By that sunlit name thou bearest,
Thou, Vaivaswata! art dearest;
Those that as their lord proclaim thee
King of Righteousness do name thee;
Better than themselves the wise
Trust the righteous. Each relies
Most upon the good, and makes
Friendship with them. Friendship takes
Fear from hearts; yet friends betray,
In good men we may trust alway."

"Sweet lady!" Yama said, "never were words
Spoke better; never truer heard by ear.
Lo! I am pleased with thee. Except this soul,
Ask one gift yet again, and get thee home."

"I ask thee, then," quickly the Princess cried,
"Sons, many sons, born of my body; boys,
Satyavân's children; lovely, valiant, strong;
Continuers of their line. Grant this, kind god.'

"I grant it," Yama answered: "thou shalt bear
Those sons thy heart desireth, valiant, strong:
Therefore go back, that years be given thee;
Too long a path thou treadest, dark and rough."

But, sweeter than before, the Princess sang:

In paths of peace and virtue
Always the good remain;
And sorrow shall not stay with them,
Nor long access of pain:
At meeting or at parting
Joys to their bosom strike,
For good to good is friendly,
And Virtue loves her like.
The great sun goes his journey,
By their strong truth impelled;
By their pure lives and penances

Is earth itself upheld:
Of all which live or shall live
Upon its hills and fields,
Pure hearts are the "protectors,"
For Virtue saves and shields.

Never are noble spirits
Poor while their like survive.
True love has wealth to render,
And Virtue gifts to give.
Never is lost or wasted
The goodness of the good;
Never against a mercy,
Against a right it stood.
And—seeing this—that Virtue
Is always friend to all,
The virtuous and true-hearted
Men their "protectors" call.

"Line for line, Princess! as thou sangest so,"
Quoth Yama, "all that lovely praise of good,
Grateful to hallowed minds, lofty in sound,
And couched in dulcet numbers—word by word—

Dearer thou grew'st to me. Oh thou great heart!
Perfect and firm! ask any boon from me—
Ask an incomparable boon!"

She cried
Swiftly, no longer stayed: "Not heaven I crave,
Nor heavenly joys, nor bliss incomparable,
Hard to be granted even by thee; but *him*,
My sweet lord's life, without which I am dead;
Give me that gift of gifts! I will not take
Aught less without him, not one boon,—no praise,
No splendours, no rewards,—not even those sons
Whom thou didst promise. Ah! thou wilt not now
Bear hence the father of them, and my hope!
Make thy free word good; give me Satyavân
Alive once more!"

And, thereupon, the god,
The Lord of Justice, high Vaivaswata,
Loosened the noose and freed the Prince's soul,
And gave it to the lady; saying this,
With eyes grown tender: "See, thou sweetest queen
Of women! brightest jewel of thy kind!

Here is thy husband. He shall live, and reign
Side by side with thee,—saved by thee,—in peace,
And fame, and wealth, and health, many long years;
For pious sacrifices, world-renowned.
Boys shalt thou bear to him, as I did grant—
Kshatriya Kings, fathers of Kings to be—
Sustainers of thy line. Also, thy sire
Shall see his name upheld by sons of sons
Like the Immortals, valiant, Mâlavas!"

These gifts the awful Yama gave, and went
Unto his place; but Sâvitrî, made glad,
Having her husband's soul, sped to the glade
Where his corse lay. She saw it there, and ran,
And sitting on the earth, lifted its head,
And lulled it on her lap, full tenderly.
Thereat warm life returned: the white lips moved;
The fixed eyes brightened, gazed, and gazed again,
As when one starts from sleep, and sees a face—
The well-beloved's—grow clear, and smiling wakes,
So Satyavân. "Long have I slumbered, dear!"
He sighed, "why didst thou not arouse me? Where

Is gone that gloomy man that haled at me?"
Answered the Princess: "Long, indeed, thy sleep,
Dear lord! and deep; for he that haled at thee
Was Yama, God of Death: but he is gone;
And thou, being rested and awake, rise now,
If thou canst rise, for look! the night is near!"

Thus, newly living, newly waked, the Prince
Glanced all around upon the blackening groves
And whispered: "I came forth to pluck the fruits,
Oh, slender-waisted! with thee: then—some pang
Shot through my temples while I hewed the wood,
And I lay down upon thy lap, dear wife!
And slept. This I do well remember! Next—
Was it a dream?—that vast, dark, mighty One
Whom I beheld? Oh, if thou saw'st and know'st,
Was it in fancy or in truth he came?"

Softly she answered: "Night is falling fast;
To-morrow I will tell thee all, dear lord!
Get to thy feet and let us seek our home.
Gods guide us! for the gloom spreads fast around;

The creatures of the forest are abroad
Which roam and cry by night. I hear the leaves
Rustle with beasts that creep. I hear this way
The yell of prowling jackals; beasts do haunt
In the southern wood; their noises make me fear!"

"The wood is black with shadows," quoth the Prince;
"You would not know the path; you could not see it.
We cannot go!"

She said: "There was to-day
A fire within the forest, and it burned
A withered tree; yonder the branches flame!
I'll fetch a lighted brand and kindle wood:
See, there is fuel here! Art thou so vexed
Because we cannot go? Grieve not! The path
Is hidden, and thy limbs are not yet knit.
To-morrow, when the way grows clear, depart;
But, if thou wilt, let us abide to-night."

And Satyavân replied: "The pains are gone
Which racked my brow; my limbs seem strong again.

Fain would I reach our home, if thou wilt aid.
Ever betimes I have been wont to come
At evening to the place where those we love
Await us. Ah! what trouble they will know,
Father and mother, searching now for us!
They prayed me hasten back. How they will weep
Not seeing me! for there is none save me
To guard them. 'Quick return,' they said; 'our lives
Live upon thine; thou art our eyes, our breath,
Our hope of lineage; unto thee we look
For funeral cakes, for mourning feasts, for all!'
What will these do alone, not seeing me
Who am their stay? Shame on the idle sleep
And foolish dreams which cost them all this pain!'
I cannot tarry here! My sire, belike,
Having no eyes, asks at this very hour
News of me from each one that walks the wood.
Let us depart! Not, Sâvitrî, for us
Think I, but for those reverend ones at home
Mourning me now. If they fare well, 'tis well

With me; if ill, naught's well! What would please
them
Is wise and good to do."

Thereat he beat
Faint hands, eager to go. And Sâvitrî,
Seeing him weeping, wiped his tears away
And gently spake: "If I have kept the fast,
Made sacrifices, given gifts, and wrought
Service to holy men, may this black night
Be bright to those and thee! for we will go;
I think I never spoke a false word once
In all my life, not even in jest: I pray
My truth may help to-night them, thee and me!"

"Let us set forth!" he cried; "if any harm
Hath fallen on those so dear, I could not live;
I swear it by my soul! As thou art sweet,
Helpful, and virtuous, aid me to depart."

Then Sâvitrî arose and tied her hair,
And lifted up her lord upon his feet;
Who, as he swept the dry leaves from his cloth,

Looked on the basket full of fruit. "But thou,"
The Princess said, "to-morrow shall bring these;
Give me thine axe; the axe is good to take!"
So saying, she hung the basket on a branch,
And in her left hand carrying the axe,
Came back, and laid his arm across her neck,
Her right arm winding round him. So they went.

. . . . . .

[The story concludes happily. Whilst the Prince and Princess find a path through the shades of the forest, the king, Dyumutsena, much afflicted at their absence, is suddenly restored to sight, and becomes consoled by his Rishis, who are convinced that Satyavân and Sâvitrî will return safe and well. Before dawn the absent pair do, indeed, come back, and, being eagerly questioned, the Prince is unable to explain what has befallen, but Sâvitrî relates it all, telling how Narada had foreseen that her husband must die, and how she had kept the "Threefold Fast" and gone with him to the wood in order to avert his doom. Whilst the Rishis are praising the virtuous Princess, and loudly declaring that her piety and courage have conquered Death himself, messengers arrive from Dyumutsena's city, announcing that the usurper has been overthrown there, and Satyavân's father re-proclaimed as king. Dyumutsena returns accordingly in triumph to his capital, with his queen, with Sâvitrî, and with her husband; and all the good fortunes promised them by Yama duly befall. Markandya finishes the narrative by saying:]

So did fair Sâvitrî from Yama save
Her lord, and all his house to glory lead.
And Draupadî, as wise and beautiful,
Shall, like that princess (O great Yudhisthir !),
Bring you past bitter seas to blessed shores.

Then was the Prince of Pandavas consoled;
He also, who shall read with heart intent
Sâvitrî's holy story, will wax glad,
And know that all fares well, and suffer not.

NALA AND DAMAYANTÎ.

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahâbhârata, line 2073, Calcutta 4to Edition.]

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PART I.

A PRINCE there was named Nala, Vîrasen's noble breed,
Goodly to see, and virtuous; a tamer of the steed;
As Indra 'midst the gods, so he of kings was kingliest one,
Sovereign of men, and splendid as the golden glittering sun;
Pure; knowing Vedas; gallant; ruling greatly Nishadh's lands;
Dice-loving, but a proud, true chief of her embattled bands;
By lovely ladies lauded; free, trained in self-control:

A shield and bow; a Manu on earth; a royal soul!

And in Vidarbha's city the Raja Bhima dwelled;
Save offspring from his perfect bliss no blessing was withheld;
For offspring many a pious rite full patiently he wrought,
Till Damana the Brahman unto his house was brought;
Him Bhima, ever reverent, did courteously entreat;
Within the Queen's pavilion led him to rest and eat;
Whereby that sage, grown grateful, gave her, for joy of joys,
A girl, the gem of girlhood, and three brave, lusty boys,—
Damana, Dama, Dânta, their names,—Damayantî she;
No daughter more delightful, no sons could goodlier be!

Stately and bright and beautiful did Damayantî grow;
No land there was which did not the slender-waisted know;

A hundred slaves her fair form decked with robe and ornament,
Like Śachi's self to serve her a hundred virgins bent;
And, 'midst them, Bhima's daughter, in peerless glory dight,
Gleamed as the lightning glitters against the murk of night,
Having the eyes of Lakshmi, long-lidded, black, and bright.
Nay, never Gods, nor Yakshas, nor mortal men among,
Was one so rare and radiant e'er seen, or sued, or sung,
As she, the heart-consuming, in heaven itself desired.

And Nala, too, of princes the tiger-prince, admired
As Kama was, in beauty like the bodied Lord of Love:
And ofttimes Nala praised they all other chiefs above
In Damayantî's hearing, and oftentimes to him
With worship and with wonder her beauty they would limn,

So that—unmet, unknowing, unseen—in each for each
A tender thought and longing grew up, from seed of speech;
And love (thou son of Kuntî!) those gentle hearts did reach.

THUS Nala, hardly bearing in his heart
The longing, wandered in his palace-woods,
And marked some water-birds, with painted plumes,
Disporting. One, by stealthy steps, he seized;
But the sky-traveller spake to Nala this:
"Kill me not, Prince! and I will serve thee well;
For I in Damayantî's ear will say
Such good of Nishadh's lord, that never more
Shall thought of man possess her, save of thee."

Thereat the Prince gladly gave liberty
To his soft prisoner, and all the swans
Flew, clanging, to Vidarbha—a bright flock—
Straight to Vidarbha, where the Princess walked:
And there beneath her eyes those wingèd ones

Lighted. She saw them sail to earth, and marked,
Sitting amid her maids, their graceful forms;
While these, for wantonness, 'gan chase the swans,
Which fluttered this and that way, through the grove:
Each girl with tripping feet her bird pursued;
And Damayantî, laughing, followed hers;
Until, at point to grasp, the flying prey
Deftly eluding touch, spake as men speak
Addressing Bhima's daughter:

"Lady dear!
Loveliest Damayantî! Nala dwells
In near Nishadha: oh, a noble prince!
Not to be matched of men; an Aświn he
For goodliness. Incomparable maid!
Wert thou but wife to that surpassing chief,
Rich would the fruit grow from such lordly birth,
Such peerless beauty, slender-waisted one!
Gods, men, and Gandharvas have we beheld,
But never none among them like to him.
As thou art Pearl of princesses, so he

Is Crown of princes; happy would it fall
One such perfection should another wed."

And when she heard that bird (O King of men!)
The Princess answered, "Go, dear swan, and tell
This same to Nala;" and the egg-born said,
"I go," and flew; and told the Prince of all.

BUT Damayantî, having heard the bird,
Lived fancy-free no more; by Nala's side
Her soul dwelt, while she sate at home distraught,
Mournful and wan, sighing the hours away,
With eyes upcast and passion-laden looks:
So that eftsoons her limbs failed, and her mind,
By love o'erweighted, found no rest in sleep,
No grace in company, no joy at feasts.
Nor night nor day brought peace: always she heaved
Sigh upon sigh, till all her maidens knew,
By glance and mien and moan, how changed she was,
Her own sweet self no more: then to the king
They told how Damayantî loved this Prince;

Which thing when Bhima from her maidens heard,
Deep pondering for his child what should be done,
And why the Princess was beside herself,
That Lord of lands perceived his daughter grown,
And knew that for her high Swayamvara
The time was come.

So to the Rajas all
The King sent word: "Ye lords of earth! attend
Of Damayantî the Swayamvara."
And when these learned of her Swayamvara,
Obeying Bhima, to his court they thronged,—
Elephants, horses, cars,—over the land
In full files wending, bearing flags and wreaths
Of countless colours, with gay companies
Of fighting men. And these high-hearted chiefs
The strong-armed King welcomed with worship fair
As fitted each, and led them to their seats.

Now, at that hour, there passed towards Indra's heaven,
Thither from earth ascending, those twain saints

The wise, the pure, the mighty-minded ones,
The self-sustained, Narad and Parvata.
The mansion of the Sovereign of the Gods
In honour entered they; and He, the lord
Of clouds, dread Indra, softly them salutes,
Enquiring of their weal, and of the world,
Wherethrough their name is famous;—how it fares?

Then Narad said, "Well is it, Lord of gods!
With us and with our world; and well with those
Who rule the peoples, O thou King in heaven!"

But He that slew the demons spake again:
"The princes of the earth, just-minded, brave,
Those who in battle fearing not to fall,
See death on the descending steel, and charge
Full front against it, turning not their face;
Theirs is this realm eternal, as to me
The Cow of plenty, Kâmadhuk, belongs!
Where be my Kshatriya warriors? wherefore now
See I none coming of those slaughtered lords,
Chiefs of mankind, our always-honoured guests?"

And unto Indra Narad gave reply:
"King of the air! no wars are waged below;
None fall in fight to enter here. The lord
Of high Vidarbha hath a daughter, famed
For loveliness beyond all earthly maids,
The Princess Damayantî, far-renowned.
Of her, dread Sakra! the Swayamvara
Shall soon befall, and thither now repair
The kings and princes of all lands to woo—
Each for himself—this pearl of womanhood,
For, oh, thou Slayer of the demons! all
Desire the maid."

Drew round, while Narad spake,
The Masters, th' Immortals, pressing in
With Agni and the greatest, near the throne,
To listen to the speech of Narada;
Whom having heard, all cried delightedly,
"We too will go!" Whereupon those high Gods,
With chariots and with heavenly retinues,
Sped to Vidartha, where the kings were met.
And Nala, knowing of the kingly tryst,

Went thither joyous; heart-full with the thought
Of Damayanti.

Thus it chanced the Gods
Beheld that prince wending along his road,
Goodly of mien as is the Lord of Love.
The world's Protectors saw him—like a sun
For splendour—and in very wonder paused
Some time irresolute; so fair he was:
Then in mid-sky their golden chariots stayed,
And through the clouds descending called to him:
"Bho! Nala of Nishadha! noblest prince,
Be herald for us; bear our message now!"

"YEA!" Nala made reply, "this will I do;"
And then,—palm unto palm in reverence pressed—
Asked: "Shining Ones! who are ye? unto whom,
And what words bearing, will ye that I go?
Deign to instruct me what it is ye bid."
Thus the Prince spake, and Indra answered him:

"Thou seest th' immortal Gods! Indra am I,
And this is Agni, and the other here
Varuna, Lord of Waters; and beyond,
Yama, the King of Death, who parteth souls
From mortal frames. To Damayantî go;
Tell our approach! Say this: 'The world's dread Lords,
Wishful to see thee, come; desiring thee—
Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama, all.
Choose of these powers to which thou wilt be given.'"
But Nala, hearing that, joined palms again
And cried: "Ah! send me not with one accord
For this, most mighty Gods! How should a man
Sue for another, being suitor too?
How bear such errand? Have compassion, Gods!"

Then spake they: "Yet thou saidst 'This will I do,'
Nishadha's prince! and wilt thou do it not,
Forswearing faith? Nay, but depart, and soon!"

So bid, but lingering yet again, he said:

"Well guarded are the gates; how shall I find
Speech with her?"

"Thou shalt find!" Indra replied;
And, lo! upon that word Nala was brought
To Damayantî's chamber. There he saw
Vidarbha's glory sitting 'mid her maids,
In majesty and grace surpassing all,
So exquisite, so delicate of form,
Waist so-fine-turned, such limbs, such lighted eyes,
The moon hath meaner radiance than she.
Love, at the sight of that soft-smiling face,
Sprang to full passion while he stood and gazed.
Yet, faith and duty urging, he restrained
His beating heart; but, when those beauteous maids
Spied Nala, from their cushions they uprose,
Startled to see a man, yet startled more
Because he showed so heavenly bright and fair.
In wondering pleasure each saluted him,
Uttering no sound, but murmuring to themselves:
"Aho! the grace of him; aho! the brilliance;
Aho! what glorious strength lives in his limbs!

What is he? is he God, Gandharva, Yaksha?"
But this unspoken, for they dared not breathe
One syllable, all standing shyly there
To see him, and to see his youth so sweet.
Yet, softly glancing back to his soft glance,
The Princess presently, with fluttering breath,
Accosted Nala, saying: "Fairest prince!
Who by that faultless form hast filled my heart
With sudden joy, coming as come the gods,
Unstayed, I crave to know thee, who thou art?
How didst thou enter? how wert thou unseen?
Our palace is close guarded, and the King
Hath issued mandates stern."

Tenderly spake
The Prince, replying to those tender words:
"Most lovely! I am Nala! I am come
A herald of the gods unto thee here.
The gods desire thee—the immortal Four—
Indra, Varuna, Yama, Agni. Choose,
Oh brightest! one from these to be thy lord.
By their help is it I have entered in

Unseen; none could behold me at thy gates,
Nor stay me passing: and to speak their will
They sent me, fairest one and best! do thou,
Knowing the message, judge as seemeth well."

SHE bowed her head, hearing the great gods named,
And then, divinely smiling, said to him:
"Pledge thyself faithfully to me, and I
Will ask, O Raja! only how to pay
That debt with all I am, with all I have;
For I and mine are thine—in full trust thine!
Make me this promise, Prince! Thy gentle name,
Sung by the swan, first set my thoughts afire;
And for thy sake,—only for thee, sweet lord—
The kings were summoned hither. If, alas!
Fair Prince! thou dost reject my sudden love
So proffered, then must poison, flame, or flood,
Or knitted cord be my sad remedy!"

So spake Vidarbha's pride, and Nala said:
"With gods in waiting, with the world's dread lords

Hastening to woo, canst thou desire a man?
Bethink! I unto these, that make and mar,
These all-wise Ones, almighty, am like dust
Under their feet. Lift thy heart to the height
Of that I bring. If mortal man offend
The most high gods, death is what springs of it:
Spare me to live, thou faultless lady! choose
Which of these excellent great gods thou wilt:
Wear the unstainèd robes! bear on thy brows
The wreaths, which never fade, of heavenly blooms!
Be, as thou may'st, a goddess, and enjoy
Godlike delights! Him who enfolds the earth,
Creating and consuming, brightest god,
Hutâśa, eater of the sacrifice,
What woman would not take? Or him whose rod
Herds all the gathered generations still
On virtue's path, Red Yama, king of death,
What woman would affront? Or him, the All-good,
All-wise, destroyer of the demons, first
In heaven, Mahendra,—who of womankind
Is there that would not take? Or, if thy mind
Incline, doubt not to choose Varuna: he

Is of these world-protectors. From a heart
Full friendly cometh what I tell thee now."

Unto Nishadha's prince the maid replied,
Tears of distress dimming her lustrous eyes:
"Humbly I reverence these mighty gods,
But thee I choose, and thee I take for lord,
And this I vow!"

With folded palms she stood
And lips a-tremble, while his answer fell:
"Sent on such embassy, how shall I dare
Speak, sweetest Princess! for myself to thee?
Bound by my promise for the gods to sue,
How can I be a suitor for myself?
Silence is here my duty; afterwards,
If I shall come in mine own name, I'll come
Mine own cause pleading. Ah! might that so be!"

Checking her tears, Damayantî sadly smiled,
And said full soft: "One way of hope I see,
A blameless way, O Lord of men! wherefrom

No fault shall rise, nor any danger fall.
Thou also, Prince, with Indra and these gods,
Must enter in where my Swayamvara
Is held; then I, in presence of those gods,
Will choose thee, dearest! for my lord; and so
Blame shall not be to thee."

With which sweet words
Soft in his ears, Nishadha straight returned
There where the Gods were gathered, waiting him;
Whom the world's Masters on his way perceived,
And spying, questioned, asking of his news.
"Saw'st thou her, Prince? didst see the sweet-lipped one?
What spake she of us? Tell us true! tell all!"

Quoth Nala: "By Your worshipful behest
Sent to her house, the great gates entered I,
Though the grey porters watched; but none might spy
My entering, by Your power, O radiant Ones!
Except the Raja's daughter; her I saw

Amidst her maidens, and by them was seen.
On me with much amazement they did gaze
Whilst I your high divinities extolled;
But she, who hath the lovely face, with mind
Set upon me, hath chosen me, ye Gods!
For thus she spake, my princess: 'Let them come,
And come thou, like a lordly tiger, too,
Unto the place of my Swayamvara;
There will I choose thee in their presence, Prince!
To be my lord; and so there will not fall
Blame, thou strong-armed, to thee!' This she did say
Even as I tell it; and what shall be next
To will is yours, O ye immortal Ones!"

SOON, when the moon was good, and day and hour
Were found propitious, Bhima, king of men,
Summoned the chiefs to the Swayamvara:
Upon which message all those eager lords
For love of Damayantî hastened there.
Glorious with gilded pillars was the court,
Whereto a gate-house opened, and thereby

Into the square like lions from the hills
Paced the proud guests; and there their seats they took,
Each in his rank, the masters of the lands,
With crowns of fragrant blossoms garlanded,
And polished jewels swinging in their ears.
Of some the thews, knitted and rough, stood forth
Like iron maces; some had slender limbs,
Sleek and fine-turned, like the five-headed snake;
Lords with long-flowing hair, glittering lords,
High-nosed, and eagle-eyed, and heavy-browed;
The faces of those kings shone in a ring
As shine at night the stars; and that great square
As thronged with Rajas was as Naga-land
Is full of serpents, thick with warlike chiefs
As mountain caves with panthers. Unto these
Entered in matchless majesty of form
The Princess Damayantî. As she came,
The glory of her ravished eyes and hearts,
So that the gaze of all those haughty kings
Fastening upon her loveliness, grew fixed—
Not moving save with her—step after step,
Onward and always following the maid.

But while the styles and dignities of all
Were cried aloud (O Son of Bhârat!), lo!
The Princess marked five in that throng alike
In form and garb and visage. There they stood
Each from the next undifferenced, and each
Nala's own self;—yet which might Nala be
In nowise could that doubting maid descry;
Who took her eye seemed Nala while she gazed,
Until she looked upon his like, and so
Pondered the lovely lady, sore perplexed,
Thinking, "How shall I tell which be the gods
And which is noble Nala?" Deep distressed
And meditative waxed she, seeking hard
What those signs were, delivered us of old,
Whereby gods may be known. "Of all those signs
Taught by our elders, lo! I see not one,
Where stand yon five,"—so murmured she, and turned
Over and over every mark she knew.
At last, resolved to make the gods themselves
Her help at need, with reverent heart and voice
Humbly saluted she those heavenly Ones,
And with joined palms and trembling accents spake:

"As when, hearing the swans, I chose my Prince,
By that sincerity I call the gods
To show my love to me and make him known!
As in my heart, and soul, and speech I stand
True to my choice, by that sincerity
I call the all-knowing gods to make me know!
As the high gods created Nishadh's chief
To be my lord, by their sincerity
I bid them show themselves and make me know!
As my vow, sealed to him, must be maintained
For his name and for mine, I call the gods
By this sincerity to make me know!
Let them appear, the Masters of the worlds,
The high Gods, each one in his proper shape,
That I may see Nishadha's chief, my choice,
Whom minstrels praise and Damayantî loves."

Hearing that earnest speech, so passion-fraught,
So full of truth, of strong resolve, of love,
Of singleness of soul and constancy,—
Even as she spake the Gods disclosed themselves:
By well-seen signs the effulgent Ones she knew.

Shadowless stood they; with *unwinking* eyes,
And skins *which never moist with sweat;* their feet
Light gliding o'er the ground, *not touching it;*
The *unfading* blossoms on their brows *not soiled*
By earthly dust, but *ever fair and fresh;*
Whilst by their side, garbed so and visaged so,
But doubled by his shadow, stained with dust,
The flower-cups wiltering in his wreath, his skin
Pearly with sweat, his feet upon the earth,
And eyes awink, stood Nala. One by one
Glanced she on those Divinities, then bent
Her gaze upon the Prince, and, joyous, said,
"I know thee, and I name my rightful lord,
Taking Nishadha's chief!" Therewith she drew
Modestly nigh, and held him by the cloth,
With large eyes beaming love, and round his neck
Hung the bright chaplet, love's delicious crown;
So choosing him, him only, whom she named
Before the face of all to be her lord.

Ah!—then brake forth from all those suitors proud,
"*Ha!*" and "*Aho!*" but from the Gods and saints

"*Sâdhu!* well done! well done!" and all admired
The happy Prince, praising the grace of him;
While Vîrasena's son, delightedly,
Spake to the slender-waisted these fond words:
"Fair Princess! since, before all Gods and men,
Thou makest me thy choice, right glad am I
Of this thy will, and true lord will I be.
For so long, loveliest! as my breath endures
Thine am I! thus I plight my troth to thee!"
So, with joined palms, unto that beauteous maid
His gentle faith he pledged, rejoicing her;
And hand in hand, radiant with mutual love,
Before great Agni and the Gods they passed,
The world's Protectors worshipping.

Then those
The Lords of life, the powerful Ones, bestowed,
Being well pleased, on Nala, chosen so,
Eight noble boons. The boon which Indra gave
Was grace, at times of sacrifice, to see
The visible god approach with step divine;
And Agni's boon was this, that he would come

Whenever Nala called; for everywhere
Hutâśa shineth, and all worlds are his.
Yama gave skill in cookery, steadfastness
In virtue; and Varuna, king of floods,
Bade all the waters ripple at his word.
These boons the high Gods doubled by the gift
Of bright wreaths wove with magic blooms of heaven,
And, those bestowed, ascended to their seats.
Also with wonder and with joy returned
The Rajas and the Maharajas all,
Full of the marriage feast; for Bhima made,
In pride and pleasure, stately nuptials:
So Damayantî and the prince were wed.

Then, having tarried as is wont, that lord,
Nishadha's chief, took the King's leave and went
Unto his city, bringing home with him
His jewel of all womanhood; with whom
Blissful he lived, as lives by Śachi's side
The Slayer of the Demons. Like a sun
Shone Nala on his throne, ruling his folk
In strength and virtue, guardian of his state.

Also the Aśwamedha rite he made,
Greatest of rites, the offering of the horse,
As did Yayâti; and all other acts
Of worship; and to sages gave rich gifts.

Many sweet days of much delicious love,
In pleasant gardens and in shadowy groves,
Passed they together, sojourning like gods.
And Damayantî bore unto her lord
A boy named Indrasen, and next a girl
Named Indrasena; so in happiness
The good Prince governed, seeing all his lands
Wealthy and well, in piety and peace.

NOW, at the choosing of Nishadha's chief
By Bhima's daughter, when those Lords of life
The effulgent gods departed, Dwapara
They saw with Kali coming. Indra said—
The Demon-slayer—spying them approach:
"Whither with Dwapara goest thou to-day,
O Kali!" And the sombre Shade replied:

"To Damayantî's high Swayamvara
I go, to make her mine, since she hath grown
Into my heart." But Indra, laughing, said:
"Ended is that Swayamvara; for she
Hath taken Raja Nala for her lord,
Before us all." But Kali, hearing this,
Brake into wrath—while he stood worshipping
That band divine—and furiously cried:
"If she hath set a man above the gods
To wed with him, for such sin let there fall
Doom, rightful, swift, and terrible, on her!"
"Nay!" answered unto him those heavenly Ones;
"But Damayantî chose with our good-will,
And what maid but would choose so fair a prince,
Seeing he hath all qualities, and knows
Virtue, and rightly practises the vows,
And reads the four great Vedas, and what's next,
The holy stories, whilst perpetually,
The gods are honoured in his house with gifts?
No hurt he does; kind to all living things;
True of word is he; faithful, liberal, just;
Steadfast and patient, temperate and pure;

A king of men is Nala, like the gods!
He that would curse a prince of such a mould,
Thou foolish Kali! lays upon himself
A sin to wreck himself: the curse comes back
And sinks him in the bottomless vast gulf
Of Narak."

Thus the Gods to Kali spake
And mounted heavenward; whereupon that Shade,
Frowning, to Dwapara burst forth: "My rage
Beareth no curb! henceforth in Nala I
Will dwell; his kingdom I will make to fall;
His bliss with Damayantî I will mar;
And thou within the dice shalt enter straight,
And help me, Dwapara! to drag him down."

WHICH evil compact binding, those repaired—
Kali and Dwapara—to Nala's house,
And haunted in Nishadha, where he ruled,
Seeking occasion 'gainst the blameless Prince.
Long watched they: twelve years rolled e'er Kali saw

The fateful fault arrive; Nishadha's lord,
Easing himself, and sprinkling hands and lips
With purifying water, passed to prayer
His feet unwashed, offending;—Kali straight
Possessed the heedless Raja, entering him.

That hour there sate with Nala, Pushkara,
His brother; and the evil spirit hissed
Into the ear of Pushkara, "Ehi!
Arise and challenge Nala at the dice!
Throw with the Prince! it may be thou shalt win
(Luck helping thee—and I), Nishadha's throne,
Town, treasures, palace; thou may'st gain them all!"
And Pushkara, hearing Kali's evil voice,
Made near to Nala with the dice in hand,
(A great piece for the "Bull" and little ones
For "Cows," and Kali hiding in the "Bull").
So Pushkara came to Nala's side and said:
"Play with me, brother, at the 'Cows and Bull.'"
And being put off, cried mockingly, "Nay, play!"
Shaming the Prince, whose spirit chafed to leave
A gage unfaced; but when Vidarbha's pride,

The Princess—heard him, Nala started up:
"Yea, Pushkara, I will play!" fiercely he said,
And to the game addressed.

His gems he lost,
Armlets, and belt, and necklet; next the gold
Of the palace and its vessels; then the cars
Yoked with swift steeds; and last the royal robes;
For, cast by cast, the dice against him fell,
Bewitched by Kali, and cast after cast
The passion of the dice gat hold on him
Until not one of all his faithfullest
Could stay the madman's hand and gamester's heart
Of who was named "Subduer of his Foes."

The townsmen gathered with the ministers;
Unto the palace-gate they thronged (my King!)
To see their lord, if so they might abate
This sickness of his soul. The charioteer
Forth-standing from the midst, low worshipping,
Spake thus to Damayantî: "Great Princess!
Before thy door all the grieved city stands:

Say to our lord for us: 'Thy folk are here;
They grieve that evil fortunes hold their liege,
Who was so high and just.'" Then she, deject,
Passed in, and to Nishadha's ruler said,
Her soft voice broken and her bright eyes dimmed:
"Raja! the people of thy town are here;
Before our gates they gather—citizens
And councillors—desiring speech with thee.
In lealty they come, wilt thou be pleased
We open to them?—wilt thou?" So she asked
Again and yet again; but not one word
To that sad lady with the lovely brows
Did Nala answer, wholly swallowed up
Of Kali and the gaming; so that those
The citizens and councillors cried out:
"Our lord is changed! he is not Nala now!"
And home returned, ashamed and sorrowful;
Whilst ceaselessly endured that foolish play
Moon after moon—the Prince the loser still.

THEN Damayantî, seeing so estranged
Her lord, the praised-in-song, the chief of men.

Watching, all self-possessed, his phantasy
And how the gaming held him,—sad and 'feared,
The heavy fortunes pondering of her prince,—
Hating the fault, but to the offender kind,
And fearing Nala should be stripped of all,
This thing devised. Vṛihatsenâ she called,
Her foster-nurse and faithful ministrant,
True, skilful at all service, soft of speech,
Kind-hearted; and she said: "Vṛihatsenâ!
Go call the ministers to council now,
As though 'twere Nala bade; and make them count
What store is gone of treasure, what abides,"
So went Vṛihatsenâ, and summoned those;
And when they knew these things as from the Prince,
"Truly we too shall perish!" cried they all;
And all to Nala went; and all the town
A second time assembling, thronged the gates:
Which Bhima's daughter told; but not one word
Answered the Prince; and when she saw her lord
Put by her plea, utterly slighting it,
Back to her chamber, full of shame, she goes,
And there still hears the dice are falling ill,

Still hears of Nala daily losing more;
So that again this to her nurse she spake:
"Send to Varshneya, good Vṛihatsenâ!
Say to the charioteer—in Nala's name—
'A great thing is to do; come thou!'" And this,
As soon as Damayantî uttered it,
Vṛihatsenâ, by faithful servants, told
Unto the son of Vrishni, who, being come
At fitting time and place, heard the sweet queen
In mournful music speak these wistful words:
"Thou knowest how thy Raja trusted thee;
Now he hath fallen on evil: succour him!
The more that Pushkara conquers in the play,
The wilder rage of gaming takes thy lord:
The more for Pushkara the dice fall well,
More contrary they happen to the Prince;
Nor heeds he, as were meet, kindred or friends;
Nay, of myself he putteth by the prayer
Unanswered, being bewitched: for well I deem
This is not noble-minded Nala's sin,
But some ill spell possesseth him to shut
His ears to me. Thou, therefore, charioteer,

.. Our refuge be! do what I shall command;
My heart is dark with fear;—yea, it may hap
Our lord will perish! wherefore, harnessing
His chosen steeds, which fly as swift as thought,
Take these our children in the chariot
And drive to Kundina, delivering there
Unto my kin the little ones, and car
And horses. Afterwards abide thou there,
Or otherwhere depart."

Varshneya heard
The words of Damayantî, and forthwith
In Nala's council-hall recounted them,
The chief men being present; who thus met,
And, long debating, gave him leave to go.
So with that royal pair to Bhima's town
Drove he, and at Vidarbha rendered up,
Together with the swift steeds and the car,
The sweet maid Indrasena, and the Prince
Indrasen, and made reverence to the king—
Saddened, for sake of Nala. Afterward
Taking his leave, unto Ayodhyâ

Varshneya went, exceeding sorrowful,
And with King Rituparna (Bhârat's Prince!)
Took service as a charioteer.'

THESE gone,
The praised-of-poets, Nala, still played on,
Till Pushkara his kingdom's wealth had won,
And whatso was to lose beside. Thereat
With scornful laugh mocked he that beggared Prince,
Saying: "One other throw! once more!—yet, sooth,
What canst thou stake? Nothing is left for thee
Save Damayantî; all the rest is mine.
Play we for Damayantî, if thou wilt." ''
But hearing this from Pushkara, the Prince
So in his heart by grief and shame was torn,
No word he uttered, only glared in wrath
Upon his mocker, upon Pushkara.
Then, his rich robes and jewels stripping off,
Uncovered, with one cloth, 'mid wailing friends,
Sorrowful passed he forth, his great state gone,

His Princess with one garment following him,
Piteous to see! And there, without the gates,
Three nights they lay, Nishadha's King and Queen.
Upon the fourth day Pushkara proclaimed
Throughout the city: "Whoso yieldeth help
To Nala dieth! let my will be known!"

So, for this bitter word of Pushkara's power
(O Yudhisthir!) the townsmen rendered not
Service nor love, but left them outcast there,
Unhelped, whom all the city should have helped.
Yet three nights longer tarried he, his drink
The common pool, his meat such fruits and roots
As miserable hunger plucks from earth;
Then fled they from their walls, the Prince going first,
The Princess following.

After grievous days,
Pinched ever with sharp famine, Nala saw
A flock of gold-winged birds lighting anigh,
And to himself the famished Raja said:
"Lo! here is food! this day we shall have store;"

Then lightly cast his cloth and covered them;
But these, fluttering aloft, bore up with them
Nala's one cloth; and hovering overhead,
Uttered sharp-stinging words, reviling him
Even as he stood, naked to all the airs,
Downcast and desperate: "Thou brain-sick Prince!
We are the Dice; we come to ravish hence
Thy last poor cloth; we were not well content
Thou should'st depart owning a garment still."
And when he saw the Dice take wings and fly,
Leaving him bare, to Damayantî spake
This melancholy Prince: "O blameless one!
They of whose malice I am driven forth,
Finding no sustenance, sad, famine-gaunt—
They whose decree forbade Nishadha's folk
Should succour me, their Raja; these have come—
Demon and Dice—and, like to wingëd birds,
Have borne away my cloth. To such shame fall'n,
Such utmost woe; wretched, demented—I
Thy lord am still, and counsel thee for good.
Attend! hence be there many roads which go
Southwards; some pass Avanti's walls, and some

Skirt Rikshavan, the Forest of the Bears;
This wends to Vindhya's lofty peaks, and this
To those green banks where quick Payoshni runs
Seaward between her hermitages, rich
In fruits and roots; and yon path leadeth thee
Unto Vidarbha, that to Kosala,
And therefrom southward—southward—far away."

So spake he to the Princess wistfully,
Between his words pointing along the paths
Which she should take (O King!); but Bhima's child
Made answer, bowed with grief, her soft voice choked
With sobs, these piteous accents uttering:

"My heart beats quick; my body's force is gone,
Thinking, dear Prince! on this which thou hast said,
Pointing along the paths. What! robbed of realm,
Stripped of thy wealth, bare, famished, parched with thirst,
Thus shall I leave thee in the untrodden wood?
Ah, no! while thou dost muse on good days fled,
Hungry and weeping, I, in this wild waste

Will charm thy griefs away, solacing thee.
The wisest doctors say, 'In every woe
No better physic is than wifely love.'
And, Nala! I will make it true to thee."

"Thou mak'st it true," he said; "thou sayest well,
Sweet Damayantî! neither is there friend
To sad men given better than a wife.
I had no thought to leave thee, foolish love!
Why didst thou fear? Alas! 'tis from myself
That I would fly—not thee, thou faultless one."

"Yet, if," the Princess answered, "Maharaj,
Thou hadst no thought to leave me, why by thee
Was the way pointed to Vidarbha's walls?
I know thou would'st not quit me, noblest Lord!
Being thyself, but only if thy mind
Were sore distraught; and see, thou gazest still
Along the southward road, my dread thereby
Increasing: thou that wert wise as the gods;
If it be thy fixed thought, 'Twere best she went
Unto her people'—be it so—I go;

But hand in hand with thee; thus let us fare
Unto Vidarbha, where the king my sire
Will greet thee well and honour thee, and we
Happy and safe within his gates shall dwell."

AS is thy father's kingdom," Nala said,
"So too was mine; be sure, whate'er befall,
Never will I go thither. How, in sooth,
Should I, who came there glorious, gladdening thee,
Creep back, thy shame and scorn, disconsolate?"

So to sweet Damayantî spake the Prince,
Beguiling her, whom now one cloth scarce clad,—
For but one garb they shared; and thus they strayed
Hither and thither, faint for meat and drink;
Until a little hut they spied, and there
Nishadha's monarch entering, sate him down
On the bare ground, the Princess by his side—
Vidarbha's glory—wearing that scant cloth,
Without a mat, soiled by the dust and mire.
At Damayantî's side he sank asleep
Outworn, and beauteous Damayantî slept,

Spent with strange trials,—she so gently reared,
So soft and holy! But while slumbering thus,
No placid rest knew Nala; troubled-tossed,
He woke, forever thinking of his realm
Lost, lieges estranged, and all the griefs
Of that wild wood. These on his heart came back,
And "What if I shall do it? what, again,
If I shall do it not?" so murmured he;
"Would death be better, or to leave my love?
For my sake she endures this woe, my fate
Too fondly sharing; freed from me, her steps
Would turn unto her people. At my side
Sure suffering is her portion; but, apart,
It might be she would somewhere comfort find."

Thus with himself debating o'er and o'er,
The Prince resolves abandonment were best:
"For how," saith he, "should any in the wood
Harm her, so radiant in her grace, so good,
So noble, virtuous, faithful, famous, pure?"
Thus mused his miserable mind, seduced
By Kali's cursèd mischiefs to betray

His sleeping wife. Then, seeing his loin-cloth gone
And Damayantî clad, he drew anigh,
" Thinking to take of hers, and muttering,
"May I not rend one fold and she not know?"
So meditating, round the cabin crept
Prince Nala, feeling up and down its walls;
And presently within the purlieus found
A naked knife, keen-tempered; therewithal
Shred he away a piece, and bound it on;
Then made with desperate steps to seek the waste,
Leaving his Princess sleeping; but anon
Turns back again in changeful mood, and glides
Into the hut, and, gazing wistfully
On slumbering Damayantî, moans with tears:-
"Ah, Sweetheart! whom nor wind nor sun before
Hath ever rudely touched; thou to be couched
In this poor hut, its floor thy bed, and I,
Thy lord, deserting thee, stealing from thee
Thy last robe! O my Love with the bright smile!
My slender-waisted queen! will she not wake
To madness? Yea, and when she wanders lone
In the dark wood, haunted with beasts and snakes

How will it fare with Bhima's tender child,
The bright and peerless? My most noble wife!
May the great sun, may the eight Powers of air,
The Rudras, Maruts, and the Aświns twain
Guard thee, thou true and dear one, on thy way!"

Thus to his sleeping queen, in all the earth
Unmatched for beauty, spake he piteously,
Then broke away once more, by Kali driven;
But yet another and another time
Stole back into the hut for one last gaze,
That way by Kali dragged, this way by love.
Two hearts he had, this trouble-stricken Prince—
One beating "Go!" one throbbing "Stay!" and thus
Backwards and forwards swings his mind between;
Till, mastered by the sorrow and the spell,
Frantic flies Nala, leaving there alone
That tender sleeper, sighing as she slept.
He flies—the soulless prey of Kali flies;
Still, while he hurries through the forest drear,
Thinking upon the sweet face he hath left.

FAR distant (King!) was Nala, when, refreshed,
The slender-waisted wakened, shuddering
At the wood's silence; but, when seeking him,
She found no Nala, sudden anguish seized
Her frightened heart, and lifting high her voice,
Loud cried she "Maharaja! Nishadh's Prince,
Ha, Lord! ha, Maharaj! ha, Master! why
Hast thou abandoned me? Now am I lost,
Am doomed, undone; left in this lonesome gloom!
Wert thou not named, O Nala! true and just!
Yet art thou these to quit me while I slept?
And hast thou so forsaken me, thy wife—
Thine own fond wife, who never wrought thee wrong,
When by all others wrong was wrought on thee?
How mak'st thou good to me now, lord of men!
Those words which long ago before the gods
Thou didst pronounce? Alas! death will not come
Except at his appointed time to men;
And therefore for a little I shall live,
Whom thou hast lived to leave. Nay, 'tis a jest!
Fie! truant! runaway! enough thou playest:

Come forth, my lord! I am afraid,—come forth!
Linger not, for I see—I spy thee there;
Thou art within yon thicket! why not speak
One word, Nishadha? Nala! cruel Prince!
Thou knowest me lone, and comest not to calm
My terrors, and be with me in my need.
Art gone indeed? I'll not bemoan myself,
Nor whatso may befall me; I must think
How desolate thou art, and weep for thee.
What wilt thou do, thirsty and hungry, spent
With wandering, when, at nightfall 'mid the trees,
Thou hast me not, sweet Prince, to comfort thee!"

Thereat, distracted by her bitter pain,
Like one whose heart is fire, forward and back
She runs, hither and thither, weeping, wild.
One while she sinks to earth, one while she springs
Quick to her feet; now utterly o'ercome
By fear and fasting, now by grief driven mad,
Wailing and sobbing; till anon, with moans
And broken sighs and tears, Bhima's fair child,
The ever-faithful wife, speaks thus again:

"By whomsoever's spell this harm hath fallen
On Nishadh's lord, I pray that evil one
May bear a bitterer plague than Nala doth.
To him, whoever set my guileless Prince
On these ill deeds, I pray some direr might
May bring even darker days, and life to live
More miserable still!"

Thus, woe-begone,
Mourned that great-hearted wife her vanished lord,
Seeking him ever in the gloomy shades,
By wild beasts haunted. Roaming everywhere,
Like one possessed—frantic, disconsolate,
Went Bhima's daughter. "Ha, ha! Maharaj!"
So crying runs she, so in every place
Is heard her ceaseless wail, as when is heard
The fish-hawk's cry, which screams, and circling screams,
And will not stint complaining.

Suddenly,
Straying too near his den, a serpent's coils

Seized Bhima's daughter! a prodigious snake,
Glittering and strong, and furious for food,
Knitted about the Princess. She, o'erwhelmed
With horror and the cold enfolding death,
Spends her last breath in pitiful laments
For Nala, not herself. "Ah, Love!" she cried,
"That would have saved me, who must perish now,
Seized in the lone wood by this hideous snake,
Why art thou not beside me? What will be
Thy thought, Nishadha! me remembering
In days to come, when, from the curse set free,
Thou hast thy noble mind again, thyself,
Thy wealth—all save thy wife? Then thou'lt be sad,
Be weary, wilt need food and drink, but I
Shall minister no longer! Who will tend
My love, my lord, my lion among kings,
My blameless Nala,—Damayantî dead?"

That hour a hunter, roving through the brake,
Heard her bewailing, and with quickened steps
Made nigh; and, spying a woman, almond-eyed
Lovely, forlorn, by that fell monster knit,

He ran, and, as he came, with keen shaft clove,
Through gaping mouth and crown, th' unwitting worm,
Slaying it. Then the woodman from its folds
Freed her, and laved the snake's slime from her limbs
With water of the pool, comforting her
And giving food; and afterwards (my King!)
Inquiry made: "What doest in this wood,
Thou with the fawn's eyes? and how camest thou,
My mistress, to such pit of misery?"

And Damayantî, spoken fair by him,
Recounted all which had befallen her.

But, gazing on her graces, scantly clad
With half a cloth, those smooth full sides, those breasts
Beauteously swelling, form of faultless mould,
Sweet youthful face, fair as the moon at full,
And dark eyes by long curving lashes swept;
Hearing her tender sighs and honeyed speech,
The hunter fell to hot desire: he dared
Essay to woo, with whispered words at first,
And then, by amorous approach, the queen;

Who, presently perceiving what he would,
And all that baseness of him—being so pure,
So chaste and faithful—like a blazing torch
Took fire of scorn and anger 'gainst the man,
Her true soul burning at him; till the wretch,
Wicked in heart, but impotent of mind,
Glared on her, splendidly invincible
In weakness, loftily defying force,
A living flame of lighted chastity.
She then, albeit so desolate, so lone,
Abandoned by her lord, stripped of her state,
Like a proud princess stormed, flinging away
All terms of supplication, cursing him
With wrath which scorched. "If I am clear in heart
And true in thought unto Nishadha's king,
Then may'st thou, vile pursuer of the beasts!
Sink to the earth stone-dead!"

While she did speak
The hunter breathless fell to earth, stone-dead,
As falls a tree-trunk blasted by the bolt.

THAT ravisher destroyed, the Lotus-eyed
Fared forward, threading still the fearful wood,
Lonely and dim, with trill of jhillikas
Resounding, and fierce noise of many beasts
Laired in its shade; lions and leopards, deer,
Close-hiding tigers, sullen bison, wolves,
And shaggy bears. Also the glades of it
Were filled with fowl which crept, or flew, and cried.
A home for savage men and murderers;
Thick with a world of trees, whereof was Śâl,
Sharp-seeded, weeping gum; knotted Bambus;
Dhavas with twisted roots; smooth Aśwatthas,
Large-leaved and clinging through the cloven rocks;
Tindukas, iron-fibred, dark of grain;
Ingudas, yielding oil, and Kinsukas
With scarlet flowerets flaming. Thronging these
Were Arjuns and Arishta clumps, which bear
The scented purple clusters; Syandans,
And tall Silk-cotton trees and Mango-belts
All silver-speared, with wild Rose-apples blent,
'Mid Lodhra tufts and Khadirs, interknit

By clinging rattans, climbing everywhere
From stem to stem. Therewith were intermixed—
Round pools where rocked the lotus—Âmalaks,
Plakshas with fluted leaves, Kadambas sweet,
Udumbaras; and on the jungle-edge
Tangles of reed and jujube, whence there rose
Bel-trees and Nyagrodhas, dropping roots
Out of the air; broad-leaved Priyâlas; palms,
And date-trees; and the gold Myrobalan,
And plant of fear, Vibhîtika. All these
Crowded the wood; and many a crag it held
With precious ore of metals interveined;
And many a creeper-covered cave, wherein
The spoken word rolled round; and many a cleft
Where the thick stems were like a wall to see;
And many a winding stream, and reedy jheel,
And glassy lakelet, where the woodland beasts
In free peace gathered.

Wandering onward thus,
The Princess saw far-gliding forms of dread,
Pisâchas, Rakshasas, ill sprites and fiends

Which haunt, with swinging snakes, the undergrowth.
Dark pools she saw, and drinking-holes, and peaks
Wherefrom brake down in tumbling cataracts
The wild white waters, marvellous to hear.
Also she passed—this daughter of a king—
Where snorted the fierce buffaloes, and where
The grey boars rooted for their food, and where
The black bears growled, and serpents in the grass
Rustled and hissed. But all along the way
Safe paced she in her majesty of grace,
High fortune, courage, constancy, and right,
Vidarbha's glory,—seeking, all alone,
Lost Nala; and less terror at those sights
Came to sad Damayantî for herself,
Threading the dreadful forest, than for him:
Most was her mind on Nala's fate intent.
Bitterly grieving stood that sweet Princess
Upon a rock, her tender limbs a-thrill
With heavy fears for Nala, while she spake:

"Broad-chested chief! my long-armed lord of men!
Nishadha's king! ah whither art thou gone,

Leaving me thus in the unpeopled wood?
The Aśwamedha sacrifice thou mad'st,
And all the rites, and royal gifts hast given;
A lion-hearted prince, holy and true
To all save me! That which thou didst declare
Hand in hand with me, once so fond and kind,
Recall it now, thy sacred word, thy vow,
Whithersoever, Raja, thou art fled.
Think how the message of the gold-winged swans
Was spoken by thine own lips then to me!
True men keep faith; this is the teaching taught
In Vedas, Angas, and Upangas all,
Hear which we may:—wilt thou not therefore, Prince
Wilt thou not, terror of thy foes! keep faith,
Making thy promise good to cleave to me?
Ha! Nala, lord! am I not surely still
Thy chosen, thy beloved? Answerest thou not
Thy wife in this dark horror-haunted shade?
The tyrant of the jungle, fierce and fell,
With jaws agape to take me, crouches nigh,
And thou not here to rescue me! not thou
Who saidst none other in this world was dear

But Damayantî! Show the fond speech true
Uttered so often. Why repliest not
To me, thy well-belovëd; me, distraught,
Longed-for and longing; me, my prince and pride!
That am so weary, weak, and miserable,
Stained with the mire, in this torn cloth half-clad,
Alone and weeping, seeing no help near?
Ah! stag of all the herd! leav'st thou thy hind
Astray, regarding not her tears which roll?
My Nala! Maharaja! it is I
Who cry, thy Damayantî, true and pure,
Lost in the wood, and still thou answerest not!
High-born, high-hearted! full of grace and strength
In all thy limbs, shall I not find thee soon
On yonder hill? shall I not see, at last,
In some track of this grim beast-haunted wood,
Standing or seated, or upon the leaves
Lying, or coming, him who is of men
The glory, but for me the grief-maker?
If not, whom shall I question, woe-begone,
Saying: 'In any region of this wood
Hast thou, perchance, seen Nala?' Is there none

In all the forest would reply to me
With tidings of my lord, wandered away,
Kingly in mind and form, of hosts of foes
The conqueror? Who will say, with blessed voice,
'That Raja with the lotus eyes is nigh,
Whom thou dost seek!'—Nay! here comes one to ask
The golden forest-king, his great jaws armed
With fourfold fangs;—a tiger standeth now
Face to face in my path. I'll speak with him
Fearlessly:—'Dreadful chief of all this waste!
Thou art the sovereign of the beasts, and I
Am daughter of Vidarbha's king; my name
The Princess Damayantî; know thou me
Wife of Nishadha's lord—of Nala—styled
Subduer of his Foes. Him seek I here,
Abandoned, sorrow-stricken, miserable!
Comfort me, mighty beast! if so thou canst,
Saying thou hast seen Nala; but if this
Thou canst not do, then—ah! thou savage lord!
Terrible friend! devour me, setting me
Free from my woes!'—The tiger answereth not;
He turns and quits me in my tears, to stalk

Down where the river glitters through the reeds,
Seeking its seaward way. Then will I pray
Unto this sacred Mount of clustered crags,
Broad-shouldered, shining, lifting high to heaven
Its diverse-coloured peaks, where the mind climbs,
Its hid heart rich with silver veins and gold,
And stored with many a precious gem unseen:
Clear towers it o'er the forest, broad and bright
Like a green banner; and the sides of it
House many living things, lions and boars,
Tigers and elephants, and bears and deer.
Softly around me from its feathered flocks
The songs ring, perched upon the kinsuk trees,
The aśokas, vakuls, and punnâga boughs,
Or hidden in the karnikara leaves,
Or tendrils of the dhava or the fig;
Full of grey glens it spreads, where waters leap
And bright birds lave. This king of hills I sue
For tidings of my lord: 'O Mountain-lord!
Far-seen and celebrated hill, that cleav'st
The blue o' the sky, refuge of living things,
Most noble eminence! I worship thee;

Thee I salute, who am a monarch's child,
The daughter and the consort of a prince,
The high-born Damayantî, unto whom
Bhima, Vidarbha's chief, that puissant lord,
Was sire, renowned o'er earth. Protector he
Of the four castes, performer of the rites
Called Rajasuya and the Aśwamedh,
A bounteous giver, first of rulers, known
For his large shining eyes; holy and just,
Fast to his word, unenvious, sweet of speech,
Gentle and valiant, dutiful and pure,
The guardian of Vidarbha, of his foes
The slayer. Know me, O majestic mount!
For that king's daughter, bending low to thee.
In Nishadh lived the father of my lord,
The Maharaja Vîrasena named,
Wealthy and great; whose son, of regal blood,
High-fortuned, powerful, and noble-souled,
Ruleth by right the realm paternal: he
Is Nala, terror of all enemies,
Dark Nala, praised in song, Nala the just,
The pure, deep-seen in Vedas, sweet of speech,

Drinker of soma-juice, and worshipper
Of Agni; sacrificing, giving gifts;
First in the wars, a perfect princely lord!
His wife am I, great Mountain! and come here,
Fortuneless, husbandless, and spiritless,
Everywhere seeking him, my best of men.
O Mount, whose double ridge stamps on the sky
Yon line, by fivescore splendid pinnacles
Indented! tell me, in this gloomy wood
Hast thou seen Nala?—Nala, wise and bold,
Like a tusked elephant for might, long-armed,
Indomitable, gallant, glorious, true;
Nala, Nishadha's chief—hast thou seen him?
Ah, mountain! why consolest thou me not,
Answering one word to sorrowful, distressed,
Lonely, lost Damayantî?"

Then she cried:

"But answer for thyself, hero and lord;
If thou be'st in the forest, show thyself.
Alas! when shall I hear that voice, as low,
As tender as the murmur of the rain,

When great clouds throng; as sweet as amrit-drink?
Thy voice once more, my Nala! calling to me
Full softly 'Damayantî!' Dearest Prince!
That would be music soothing to those ears,
As sound of sacred legends; that would stay
My pains, and comfort me, and bring me peace.'

Thereafter, turning from the mount, she went
Northwards, and, journeying three nights and days,
Came on a green incomparable grove,
By holy men inhabited: a haunt
Placid as Paradise, whose indwellers
Like to Vaśistha, Bhrigu, Atri were,
Those ancient saints. Restraining sense they lived,
Heedful in meats, subduing passion, pure,
Breathing within, their food water and herbs,
Ascetics, very holy, seeking still
The heavenward road, clad in the bark of trees
And skins, all idle gauds of earth laid by.
This hermitage, peopled by gentle ones,
Glad Damayantî saw, circled with herds
Of wild things grazing fearless, and with troops

Of monkey-folk o'erhead; and when she saw,
Her heart was lightened for its quietness.
So drew she nigh, that lovely wanderer—
Bright-browed, long-tressed, large-hipped, full-bosomed, fair,
With pearly teeth and honeyed mouth, in gait
Right queenly still, having those long black eyes,
The wife of Vîrasena's son, the gem
Of all dear women, glory of her time—
Sad Damayantî entered their abode,
Those holy men saluting reverently
With modest body bowed. Thus stood she there;
And all the saints spake gently "*Swâgatam!*
Welcome!" and gave the greetings which are meet;
And afterwards "Repose thyself" they said;
"What would'st thou have of us?" Then with soft words
The slender-waisted spake: "Of all these here
So worshipful, in sacrifice and rite,
Amid your beasts and birds, in tasks and toils
And blameless duties, is it well?" And they
Answered: "We thank you, noble lady; well!
Tell us, most beauteous one, thy name, and say

What thou desirest. Seeing thee so fair,
So noble, yet so sorrowful, our minds
Are lost in wonder. Weep not; comfort take.
Art thou the goddess of the wood? art thou
The mountain Yakshi, or belike the sprite
Which lives under the river? Tell us true,
Gentle and faultless form."

Whereat reply
Thus made she to the Rishis: "None of these
Am I, good saints; no goddess of the wood,
Nor yet a mountain nor a river sprite.
A woman ye behold, most holy ones,
Whose moving story I will tell ye true.
The Raja of Vidarbha is my sire,
Bhima his name, and—best of Twice-born—know
My husband is Nishadha's chief, the famed,
The wise, and valiant, and victorious prince,
The high and lordly Nala; of the gods
A steadfast worshipper, of Brahmanas
The friend; his people's shield, honoured and strong;
Truth-speaking, skilled in arms, sagacious, just;

Terrible to all foes; fortunate; lord
Of many conquered towns; a godlike man;
Princeliest of princes—Nala; one that hath
A countenance like the full moon's for light,
And eyes of lotus. This true offerer
Of sacrifices—this close votary
Of Vedas and Vedângas, in the war
Deadly to enemies, like sun and moon
For splendour—by a certain evil band
Being defied to dice, my virtuous Prince
Was, by their wicked arts, of realm despoiled,—
Wealth, jewels, all. I am his woeful wife,
The Princess Damayantî. Seeking him
Through thickets have I roamed, over rough hills,
By crag and river, and the reedy lake,
By marsh and waterfall and jungle-bush,
In quest of him, my lord, my warrior,
My hero,—and still roam, uncomforted.
Worshipful brethren! say if he hath come—
Nishadha's chief, my Nala—hitherward
Unto your pleasant homes,—he for whose sake
I wander in the dismal pathless wood,

With bears and tigers haunted—terrible?
Ah! if I find him not ere there be passed
Many more nights and days, peace will I win;
For death shall set my mournful spirit free.
What cause have I to live, lacking my Prince?
Why should I longer breathe, whose heart is dead
With sorrow for my lord?"

To Bhima's child,
So in the wood bewailing, made reply
Those holy truthful men: "Beautiful one!
The future is for thee; fair will it fall:
Our eyes, by long devotions opened, see
Even now thy lord; thou shalt behold him soon,
Nishadha's chief, the famous Nala, strong
In battle, loving justice. Yea, thy Prince
Thou wilt regain, Bhima's sad daughter! freed
From troubles, purged of sin; and witness him,
With all his gems and glories, governing
Nishadha once again, invincible,
Joy of his friends and terror of his foes.

'Yea, noblest! thou shalt have thy love anew,
In days to come."

So speaking, from the sight
Of Damayantî at that moment passed
Hermits, with hermitage and holy fires
Evanishing. In wonderment she stood
Gazing bewildered. Then the Princess cried:
"Was it in dream I saw them? whence befell
This unto me? where are the brethren gone?
The ring of huts, the pleasant stream that ran
With birds upon its crystal banks, the grove
Delightful with its fruits and flowers?" Long while
Pondered and wondered Damayantî there,
Her bright smile fled, pale, strengthless, sorrowful;
Then to another region of the wood,
With sighs and eyes welling great tears, she passed
Lamenting; till a beauteous tree she spied
The Aśoka—best of trees. Fair rose it there
Beside the forest, glowing with the flame
Of gold and crimson blossoms, and its boughs
Full of sweet-singing birds.

"*Ahovat!* Look!"
She cried. "Ah, lovely tree! that wavest here
Thy crown of countless shining clustering blooms
As thou wert woodland-king! Aśoka tree!
Tree called the 'Sorrow-ender'—Heart's-ease tree!
Be what thy name saith; end my sorrow now,
Saying, ah! bright Aśoka! thou hast seen
My Prince, my dauntless Nala,—seen that lord
Whom Damayantî loves and his foes fear;
Seen great Nishadha's chief, so dear to me:
His tender princely skin in rended cloth
Scantily clad! Hath he passed wandering
Under thy branches, grievously forlorn?
Answer, Aśoka; 'Sorrow-ender,' speak!
That I go sorrowless. O Heart's-ease! be
Truly heart's-easing,—ease my heart of pain!"

Thus, wild with grief, she spake unto the tree,
Round and round pacing, as to reverence it;
And then, unanswered, the sweet lady went
Through wastes more dreadful, passing many a Ran,
Many still-gliding rillets, many a peak

Tree-clad, with beasts and birds of wondrous sort,
In dark ravines, and caves, and lonely glooms.
These things saw Damayantî, Bhima's child,
Seeking her lord.

At last, on the long road,
She, whose soft smile was once so beautiful.
A caravan encountered. Merchantmen
With trampling horses, elephants, and wains
Made passage of a river, running slow
In cool clear waves. The quiet waters gleamed,
Shining and wide-outspread, between the canes
Which bordered it, wherefrom echoed the cries
Of fish-hawks, curlews, and red chakravâks;
With sounds of leaping fish, and watersnakes,
And tortoises, amid its shoals and flats
Sporting or feeding.

When she spied that throng,
All-maddened with her anguish, weak and wan,
Half-clad, bloodless and thin, her long black locks
Matted with dust, breathlessly brake she in

Upon them—Nala's wife—so beauteous once,
So honoured. Seeing her, some fled in fear;
Some gazed, speechless from wonder; some called out,
Mocking the mournful face with words of scorn;
But some (my King!) had pity of her woe,
And spake her fair, inquiring, "Who art thou,
And whence? and in this wood what seekest thou,
To come so wild? Thy mien astonisheth!
Art of our kind, or art thou something strange,
The spirit of the forest, or the hill,
Or river-valley? Tell us true, then we
Will buy thy favour. If indeed thou be'st
Yakshî or Rakshasî, or she-creature
Haunting this region, be propitious! send
Our caravan in safety on its path,
That we may quickly, by thy fortune, go
Homeward, and all fair chances fall to us."

Hereby accosted, softly gave response
That royal lady, weary for her lord,
Answering the leader of the caravan
And those that gathered round, a marvelling throng

Of men, and boys, and elders: "Oh, believe
I am, as you, of mortal birth, but born
A Raja's child, and made a Raja's wife.
Him seek I, chieftain of Nishadha named,
Prince Nala, famous, glorious, first in war.
If ye know aught of him, my king, my joy,
My tiger of the jungle, my lost lord,
Quick! tell me, comfort me!"

Then he who led
Their line, the merchant Śuchi, answering,
Spake to the peerless Princess: "Hear me now;
I am the captain of this caravan,
But nowhere one named as thy Prince is named
Have I or these beheld. Of evil beasts
The woods were full; cheetahs, and bears, and cats,
Tigers, and elephants, bison and boar:
Those saw we in the brake on every side,
But nowhere aught of human shape save thee.
May Maṇibhadra have us in his grace,
The lord of Yakshas, as I tell thee truth!"

Then sadly spake she to the trader-chief

And to his band: "Whither wend ye, I pray?
Please ye acquaint me where this Sârthâ goes?"

Replied the captain: "Unto Chedi's realm,
Where rules the just Subâhu, journey we,
To sell our merchandise, daughter of men."

THUS by the chieftain of the band informed,
The peerless Princess journeyed with them, still
Seeking her lord; and at the first the way
Fared through another forest, dark and deep.
Afterwards came the traders to a pool,
Broad, everywhere delightful, odorous
With cups of opened lotus, and its shores
Green with rich grass and edged with garden trees;
A place of flowers, and fruit, and singing birds.
So cool and clear and peacefully it gleamed,
That men, with cattle, weary from the march,
Clamoured to pitch; and, on their captain's sign,
The pleasant hollow entered they, and camped,
All the long caravan, at sunset's hour.

.. There in the quiet of the middle night
Deep slumbered these, when sudden on them fell
A herd of elephants, thirsting to drink;
In rut, the mada oozing from their heads;
And when those great beasts spied the caravan
And smelled the tame cows of their kind, they rushed
Headlong and mad with must, o'erwhelming all,
In onset vast and irresistible.
As when from some tall peak into the plain
Thunder and smoke and crash the rolling rocks,
Through splintered stems and thorns so breaking a way,
On swept the herd to where, beside the pool,
Those sleepers lay, and trampled them to earth,
Half risen, helpless, shrieking in the dark
"Haha! the elephants." Of those unslain,
Some in the thickets sought a shelter; some,
Yet dazed with sleep, stood panic-stricken, mute;
Till, here with tusks and there with trunks, the beasts
Gored them and battered them and trod them flat
Under their monstrous feet. Then might be seen
Camels with camel-drivers perishing,
And men flying in fear who struck at men;

Terror and death and clamour everywhere:
While some, despairing, cast themselves to earth;
And some, in fleeing, fell and died; and some
Climbed to the tree-tops. Thus on every side
Scattered and ruined was that caravan,
Cattle and merchants, by the herd assailed.
So hideous was the tumult, all three worlds
Seemed filled with fright, and one was heard to call:
"The fire is in the tents! fly for your lives!
Stay not!" and others cried: "Look where we leave
Our treasures trodden down! gather them! Halt!
Why run ye, losing ours and yours? Nay, stay!
Stand ye and we will stand;" and then to these
One voice cried "Stand!" another "Fly! we die!"
Answered by such again as shouted, "Stand!
Think what we lose, O cowards!"

While this rout
Raged, amid dying groans and sounds of fear,
The Princess, waking startled, terror-struck,
Saw such a sight as might the boldest daunt,
Such scene as those great lovely lotus eyes

Ne'er gazed upon before. Sick with new dread,
Her breath suspended 'twixt her lips, she rose,
And heard of those surviving some one moan
Amidst his fellows: "From whose evil act
Is this the fruit? hath worship not been paid
To mighty Maṇibhadra? gave we not
The reverence due to Vaishravan, that king
Of all the Yakshas? was not offering made
At th' outset to all spirits which impede?
Was this the evil portent of the birds?
Were the stars adverse? or what else hath fall'n?

And others said, wailing for friends and goods:
"Who was that woman, with mad eyes, that came
Into our camp, ill-favoured, hardly cast
In mortal mould? By her, be sure, was wrought
This direful sorcery. Demon or witch,
Yakshî or Rakshasî, or gliding ghost,
Or something frightful was she. Hers this deed
Of midnight murders; doubt there can be none!
Ah! if we could but spy that hateful one,
The ruin of our march, the woe-maker,

With stones, clods, canes, and clubs, nay, with clenched
fists,
We'd strike her dead, the murderess of our band."

Trembling, the Princess heard those angry words,
And, saddened, maddened, shamed, breathless, she fled
Into the thicket, doubtful if such sin
Might not be hers, and with fresh dread distressed.
"*Aho!*" she weeps, "pitiless grows the wrath
Of fate against me; not one gleam of good
Arriveth! Of what fault is this the fruit?
I cannot call to mind a wrong I wrought
To any—even a little thing—in act,
Or thought, or word; whence then hath come this
curse?
Belike from ill deeds done in bygone lives
It hath befall'n, and what I suffer now
Is payment of old evils undischarged.
Grievous the doom! my palace lost, my lord,
My children, kindred; I am torn away
From home, and love, and all, to roam accurst
In this plague-haunted waste."

When broke the day,
Those which escaped alive, with grievous cries,
Departed, mourning for their fellows slain.
Each one a kinsman or a friend laments,
Father or brother, son, or comrade dear.

And Damayantî, hearing, weeps anew,
Saying: "What dreadful sin was that I wrought
Long, long ago, which, when I chancè to meet
These wayfarers in the unpeopled wood,
Dooms them to perish by the elephants,
In my dark destiny enwrapped? No doubt
More and more sorrow I shall bear or bring;
For none dies ere his time: this is the lore
Of ancient sages; this is why, being glad
If I could die, I was not trampled down
Under the elephants. There haps to man
Nothing except by destiny. Why else,
Seeing that never have I wrought one wrong
From childhood's hours, in thought, or word, or deed,
Hath this woe fall'n? May be—meseems it may,
The mighty gods, at the Swayamvara

Slighted by me for Nala's dearest sake,
Are wroth, and by their dread displeasure thus
To loss and loneliness I am consigned."

So, woe-begone and wild, this noble wife,
Deserted Damayantî, wailed her griefs;
And afterwards, with certain Brahmanas
Saved from the rout, good men that knew the Veds,
Sadly her road she finished, like the moon,
Who goeth clouded in the month of rain.
Thus, travelling long, the Princess drew at last
Nigh to a city at the evening hour;
The dwelling-place it was of Chedi's chief,
The just Subâhu. Through its lofty gates
Painfully passed she, clad in half a cloth;
And as she entered—sorrow-stricken, wan,
Foot-weary, stained with mire, with unsmoothed hair,
Unbathed, and eyes of madness—those who saw
Wondered and stared, and watched her as she toiled
Down the long city street. The children broke
From play, and—boys with girls—followed her steps,
So that she came—a crowd encompassing—

Unto the king's door. On the palace roof
The mother of the Maharaja paced,
And marked the throng and that sad wayfarer;
Then to her nurse spake the queen-mother this:
"Go thou and bring yon woman unto me!
The people trouble her; mournful she walks,
Seeming unfriended, yet bears she a mien
Made for a king's abode, and, all so wild,
Still show her wistful eyes like the great eyes
Of Lakshmi's self." So downwards went the nurse,
And bade the rude folk back, and to the roof
Of the great palace led that wondering one,
Desolate Damayantî; whom the queen
Courteous besought: "Though thou art wan of face,
Thou wear'st a noble air, which through thy griefs
Shineth as lightning doth behind its cloud.
Tell me thy name, and whose thou art, and whence?
No low-born form is thine, albeit thou com'st
Wearing no ornaments, and all alone
Wanderest, not fearing men; by some spell safe.'

Hearing which words, the child of Bhima spake

Gratefully this: "A woeful woman I,
And woeful wife, but faithful to my vow:
High-born, but like a servant, like a slave,
Lodging where it may hap, and finding food
From the wild roots and fruits, wherever night
Brings me my resting-place. Yet is my lord
A prince noble and great, with countless gifts
Endued; and him I followed faithfully
As 'twere his shadow, till hard fate decreed
That he should fall into the rage of dice;
And, worsted in that play, into the wood
He fled, clad in one cloth, frenzied and lone;
And I his steps attended in the wood,
Comforting him, my husband. But it chanced,
Hungry and desperate, he lost his cloth;
And I, one garment bearing, followed still
My lord unclad, despairing, reasonless,
Through many a weary night not slumbering.
But when, at length, a little while I slept,
My Prince abandoned me, rending away
Half of my garment, leaving there his wife,
Who never wrought him wrong! That lord I seek

By day and night, with heart and soul on fire,—
Seek, but still find not, though he is to me
Brighter than light which shines from lotus-çups,
Divine as are the immortals, dear as breath,
The master of my life, my pride, my joy!"

Whom, grieving so, her sweet eyes blind with tears,
Gently addressed Subâhu's mother, sad
To list as she to tell: "Stay with us here,
Thou ill-starred lady! great the friendliness
I have for thee. The people of our court
Shall thy lost husband seek; or, it may be,
He, too, will wander hither of himself
By devious paths: yea, mournful one, thy lord
Thou wilt regain, abiding with us here."

And Damayantî, bowing, answered thus
Unto the queen: "I will abide with thee
O mother of illustrious sons! if so
They feed me not on orts, nor seek from me
To wash the feet of comers, nor that I
Be set to speak with any stranger men
Before the curtain; and if any man

Sue me, that he be punished; and if twice,
Then that he die, guilty of infamy.
This is my earnest prayer; but Brahmanas
Who seek my husband or bear news of him,
Such will I speak with. If it may be thus,
Gladly would I abide, great lady, here;
If otherwise, it is not in my mind
To sojourn longer."

Very tenderly
Quoth the queen-mother: "All which thou dost ask
We will ordain. The gods reward thy love,
Which holds such honour." Comforting her so,
To the king's daughter, young Sunandâ, spake
The Maharajni: "See, Sunandâ! here,
Clad as a handmaid but in form divine,
One of thy years, gentle and true. Be friends;
Take and give pleasure in glad company,
Each with the other keeping happy hearts."

So went Sunandâ joyous to her house,
Leading with loving hands the Princess in,
The maidens of the court accompanying.

PART II.

NOT long (O Maharaj!) was Nala fled
From Damayantî, when, in midmost glooms
Of the thick wood, a flaming fire he spied,
And from the fire's heart heard proceed a voice
Of one imperilled, crying many times:
"Haste hither, Punyashloka! Nala, haste!"
"Fear not!" the Prince replied, "I come," and sprang
Across the burning bushes, where he saw
A snake—a king of serpents—lying curled
In a great ring; which reared its dancing crest,
Saluting; and in human accents spoke:
"Maharaj! kindly lord! I am the snake
Karkotaka; by me was once betrayed
The famous Rishi Narada; his wrath
Doomed me, thou chief of men, to bear this spell.
'Coil thy false folds,' he said, 'for ever here,
A serpent, motionless upon this spot,

Till it shall chance that Nala passeth by
And bears thee hence; then only from my curse
Canst thou be freed.' And, prisoned by that curse,
I have no power to stir, though the wood burns;
No, not a coil! Good-fellowship I'll show
If thou wilt succour me. I'll be to thee
A faithful friend, as no snake ever yet.
Lift me, and quickly from the flames bear forth;
For thee I shall grow light." Thereat shrank up
That monstrous reptile to a finger's length;
And grasping this, into a place secure
From burning Nala bore it, where the air
Breathed freshly, and the fire's black path was stayed.

Then made the Prince to lay the serpent down,
But yet again it speaks: "Nishadha's lord!
Grasp me and slowly go, counting thy steps;
For, Raja, thou shalt have good fortune hence."
So Nala slowly went, counting his steps;
And when the tenth pace came, the serpent turned
And bit the Prince. No sooner pierced that tooth
Than all the likeness of Nishadha changed;

And, wonder-struck, he gazed upon himself;
While from the dust he saw the snake arise
A man, and, speaking as Karkotaka,
Comfort him thus:

"Thou art by me transformed
That no man know thee; and that evil one—
Possessing and undoing thee with grief—
Shall so within thee by my venom smart,
Shall through thy blood so ache, that, till he quit,
He shall endure the woe he did impart.
Thus by my potent spell, most noble Prince—
Who sufferest too long—thou wilt be freed
From him that haunts thee. Fear no more the wood,
Thou tiger of all princes! fear thou not
Horned nor fanged beasts, nor any enemies,
Though they be Brahmans. Safe thou goest now,
Guarded from grief and hurt, chieftain of men!
By this kind poison. In the fields of war
Henceforth the victory always falls to thee;
Go joyous therefore, Prince! give thyself forth
For Vahuka the Charioteer: repair

To Rituparna's city, who is skilled
In play, and dwells in fair Ayodhya.
Wend thou, Nishadha, thither; he will teach
Great subtlety in numbers unto thee,
Exchanging this for thine own matchless gift
Of taming horses. From the lordly line
Descended of Ikshvâku, glad and kind
The king will be; and thou, learning of him
His deepest art of dice, wilt win back all,
And clasp again thy Princess. Therefore waste
No thought on woes. I tell thee truth; thy realm
Thou shalt regain: and, when the time is come
That thou hast need to put thine own form on,
Call me to mind, O prince! and tie this cloth
Around thy body. Wearing it, thy shape
Thou shalt resume."

Therewith the serpent gave
A magic twofold robe, not wove on earth,
Which (O thou son of Kuru!) Nala took;
And so the snake, transformed, vanished away.

THE great snake being gone, Nishadha's chief
Set forth, and on the tenth day entered in
At Rituparna's town: there he besought
The presence of the Raja, and spake thus:
"I am the chariot-driver Vahuka;
There is not on this earth another man
Hath gifts like mine to tame and guide the steed;
Moreover, thou mayest use me in nice needs
And dangerous, where kings lack faithful hearts:
Specially seen I am in dressing meats;
And whatso other duties may befall,
Though they be weighty, I will execute
If, Rituparna! thou wilt take me in."

"I take thee," quoth the king; "dwell here with me.
Such service as thou knowest, render us.
'Tis, Vahuka, for ever in my heart,
To have my steeds the swiftest; be thy task
To train me horses like the wind for speed.
My charioteer I make thee, and thy wage

Ten thousand gold suvernas. Thou wilt have
For fellows Varshneya and Jîvala;
With those abiding, lodge thou happy here."

So, entertained and honoured of the king,
In Rituparna's city Nala dwelled,
Lodging with Varshneya and Jîvala.

There sojourned he (my Raja!) thinking still,
Of sweet Vidarbha's Princess, day by day;
And sunset after sunset one sad strain
He sang: "Where resteth she, that roamed the wood,
Hungry, and parched, and worn, but always true?
Doth she remember yet her faultful lord?
Ah! who is near her now?" So it befell
Jîvala heard him ever sighing this,
And questioned: "Who is she thou grievest for?
Say, Vahuka! fain would I know her name.
Long life be thine, but tell me who he is,
The blameful man that was the lady's lord."

And Nala answered him: "There lived a man,

Evil and rash, that had a noble wife.
False to his word he was, and thus it fell
That, somewhere, for some reasons, (ask not me),
He quitted her, this rash one. And—so wrenched
Apart from hers—his spirit, bad and sad,
Muses and moans; with grief's slow fire consumed,
Night-time and day-time. Thence it is he sings
At every sunset this unchanging verse,
An outcast on the earth, by hazard led
Hither or thither. Such a man thou seest,
Woeful, unworthy, holding in his heart
Always that sin. I was that lady's lord,
Whom she did follow through the dreadful wood,
Living by me abandoned at this hour.
If yet in truth she lives, youthful, alone,
Unpractised in the ways, not meriting
Fortunes so hard—Ah! if indeed she lives
Who roamed the thick and boundless forest, full
Of prowling beasts, roamed it, my Jîvala!
Unguarded by her guilty lord,—forsook,
Betrayed, good friend!"

Thus did Nishadha grieve,
Calling sweet Damayantî to his mind.
So tarried he within the Raja's house,
And no man knew his place of sojourning.

WHILE, stripped of state, the Prince and Princess thus
Were sunk to servitude, Bhima made quest,
Sending his Brahmans forth to search for them
With strait commands, and for their road-money
Liberal store. "Seek everywhere," he said
Unto the twice-born, "Nala;—everywhere
My daughter Damayantî; whoso comes
Successful in this search, discovering her—
With lost Nishadha's lord—and bringing them,
A thousand cows to that man will I give,
And village lands whence shall be revenue
As great as from a city. If so be
Ye cannot bring me Nala and my child,
To him that learns their refuge I will give
The thousand cows."

Thereby rejoiced they went,
Those Brahmans, hither and thither, up and down,
Into all regions, rajaships, and towns,
Seeking Nishadha's Raja and his wife.
But Nala nowhere found they; nowhere found
Sweet Damayantî, Bhima's beauteous child.

Until, straying to pleasant Chedipur
One day a twice-born came, Sudeva named,
And entered in, and spying round about—
Upon a feast-day by the king proclaimed,—
He saw forth-passing through the palace gate
A woman—Bhima's daughter—side by side
With young Sunandâ. Little praise had now
That beauty which in old days shone so bright;
Marred with much grief it was, like sunlight dimmed
By fold on fold of wreathed and creeping mist.
But when Sudeva marked the great dark eyes,
Lustreless though they were, and she so worn,
So listless, "Lo! the Princess," whispered he;
"'Tis the king's daughter," quoth he to himself:
And thus mused on:

"Yea! as I used to see
'Tis she! none other woman hath such grace!
My task is done, I gaze on that one form
Which is like Lakshmi's, whom all worlds adore:
I see the bosoms rounded, dark, and smooth
As they were sister-moons; the soft moon-face,
Which with its gentle light makes all things bright
Where it doth gleam; the large deep lotus-eyes,
That, like to Rati's own, the queen of love,
Beam, each a lovelit star, filling the worlds
With longing. Ah! fair lotus-flower, plucked up
By fate's hard grasp from far Vidarbha's pool,
How is thy cup muddied and slimed to-day!
Ah! moon, how is thy night like to th' eclipse
When Rahu swallows up the silver round!
Ah! tearless eyes, weary with weeping him,
How are ye like to gentle streams run dry!
Ah! lake of lilies, where grief's elephant
Hath swung his trunk, and turned the crystal black,
And scattered all the blue and crimson cups,
And frightened off the birds. Ah! lily-cup,
Tender, and delicately leaved, and reared

To blossom in a palace built of gems,
How dost thou wither here, wrenched by the root,
Sun-scorched and faded! Noblest, loveliest, best—
Who bear'st no gems, yet so becomest them—
How like the new moon's silver horn thou art
When envious black clouds blot it! Lost for thee
Are love, home, children, friends, and kinsmen; lost
All joy of that fair body thou dost wear,
Only that it may last to find thy lord!
Truly a woman's ornament is this;
The husband is her jewel,—lacking him
She hath none, though she shine with priceless pearls.
Piteous must be her state; and, torn from her,
Doth Nala cling to life, or day by day
Waste with long yearning? Oh, as I behold
Those black locks, and those eyes—dark and long shaped,
As are the hundred-petalled lotus' leaves—
And watch her joyless who deserves all joy,
My heart is sore. When will she over-pass
The river of this sorrow, and come safe
Unto its farther shore? When will she meet

Her lord, as moon and moon-star in the sky
Mingle? For, as I think, in winning her
Nala should win his happy days again,
And—albeit banished now—have back his lands.
Alike in years and graces, and alike
In lordly race these were: no bride could seem
Worthy Nishadha, if it were not she;
Nor husband worthy of Vidarbha's pride,
Save it were Nala. It is meet I bring
Comfort forthwith to yon despairing one,
The consort of the just and noble Prince,
For whom I see her heart-sick. I will go
And speak good tidings to that moon-faced queen,
Who once knew nought of sorrow, and to-day
Stands yonder, plunged heart-deep in woeful thought."

So, all those signs and marks considering,
Which stamped her Bhima's child, Sudeva drew
Nearer, and said: "Vaidarbhi! Nala's wife,
I am the Brahmana Sudeva, friend
Unto my lord thy brother, and I come,
By royal Bhima's mandate, seeking thee.

That Maharaj, thy father, dwells in health;
Thy mother and thy house are well, and well—
With promise of long years—thy little ones,
Sister and brother. Yet, for thy sake, queen,
Thy kindred sit as men with spirit gone.
In search of thee a hundred twice-born rove
Over all lands."

But (O King Yudhisthir!)
Hardly one word she heard before she broke
With question after question on the man,
Asking of this dear name, and that, and this,
All min led with quick tears and tender sighs,
And hungry gazing on her brother's friend,
Sudeva—best of Brahmanas—come there.
Which soon Sunandâ marked, watching them speak
Apart, and Damayantî all in tears.
So went she to her mother, saying: "See!
The handmaid thou didst give me talks below
With one who is a Brahman, all her words
Mingled with weeping; if thou wilt, demand
What this man knows."

Therewith swept forth, amazed,
The mother of the Raja, and beheld
How Nala's wife spake with the Brahmana;
Whom straight she bade them summon; and, being brought,
In this wise questioned: "Knowest thou whose wife,
Whose daughter, this one is, and how she left
Her kin; and wherefore, being heavenly-eyed
And noble-mannered, she hath wandered here?
I am full fain to hear it; tell me all
No whit withholding; answer faithfully;
Who is our slave-girl with the goddess-gait?"

The Brahmana Sudeva, so addressed
Seating himself at ease, unto the queen
Told Damayantî's story, how all fell.

SUDEVA said: "There reigns in majesty
King Bhima at Vidarbha, and of him
The Princess Damayantî here is child;
And Vîrasena's son—Nala—is lord

Over Nishadha, praised in song, and wise;
And of that Prince this lady is the wife.
In play his brother worsted Nala, stripped
Of lands and wealth the Prince; who fled his realm,
Wandering with Damayantî where none knew.
In quest of Damayantî we have roamed
The earth's face over, till I found her here
In thy son's house, the king's,—the very same,
Since like to her for grace no woman lives
Of all fair women. Where her eyebrows meet
A pretty mole, born with her, shall be seen,
A little lotus-bud, not visible
By reason of the dust of toil which clouds
Her face and veils its moonlike beauty. That
The Wondrous Maker on the rare work stamped
To be His mark. But as the waxing moon
Goes thin and darkling for a while, then rounds
The crescent's rims with splendour, so this queen
Hath lost not queenliness, being now obscured.
Soiled with the grime of chares, unbeautified,
She shows true gold. The fire which trieth gold
Denoteth less itself by instant heat

Than Damayantî by her goodlihood.
At first sight knew I her: she hath that mole!"

Whilst yet Sudeva spake (O King of men!)
Sunandâ from her forehead washed away
The gathered dust, and forth the mark appeared
'Twixt Damayantî's brows, as when clouds break,
And in the sky the moon, the night-maker,
Glitters to view. Seeing that spot, awhile
Sunandâ and the mother of the king
Gazed voiceless; then they clasped her neck and wept,
Rejoicing; till the queen, staying her tears,
Exclaimed: "My sister's daughter, Dear! thou art
By this same mark: thy mother and myself
Were sisters by one father, he that rules
Daśarna, King Sudâman. She was given
To Bhima, and to Virabâhu I.
Once at Daśarna, in my father's house,
I saw thee, newly born. Thy race and mine,
Princess, are one; henceforward, therefore, here
As I am, Damayantî, shalt thou be."

With gladdened heart did Damayantî bend
Before her mother's sister, answering thus:
"Peaceful and thankful dwelled I here with thee
Being unknown; my every need supplied,
My life and honour by thy succour safe.
Yet, Maharajni! even than this dear home
One would be dearer; 'tis so many days
Since we were parted; suffer me to go
Where those my tender little ones were led,
Too long, poor babes! of me and of their sire
Bereft. If, lady, thou dost think to do
Kindness to me, this is my wish, to wend
Unto Vidarbha swiftly; wilt thou bid
They bear me thither?"

Was no sooner heard
That fond desire than the queen-mother gave
Willing command, and soon an ample troop—
The king consenting—gathered for her guard.
So was she sent upon a palanquin,
With soldiers, pole-bearers, and meat and drink,
And garments as befitted—happier—home.

Thus to Vidarbha came its pride again,
By no long road; and joyously her kin
Brought the sweet Princess in, and welcomed her.
In peace and safety all her house she found;
Her children well,—father and mother, friends.
The gods she worshipped, and to Brahmanas
Due reverence made, and whatso else was meet
That Damayantî did, regal in all.
To wise Sudeva fell the thousand cows
By Bhima granted, with the village lands,
And noble gifts beside.

But when there passed
One night of rest within the palace walls,
The wistful Princess to her mother said:
"If thou would'st have me live, I tell thee true,
Dear mother! it must be by bringing back
My Nala, my own lord, and only so.'

When this she spake, right sorrowful became
The Rani, weeping silently, nor gave
One word of answer; and the palace girls,

Seeing this grief, sate round them weeping too,
And crying: "*Haha!* where is gone her lord?"
And loud the lamentation was of all.

Afterwards to the Maharaj his queen
Told what was said: "Lord! all uncomforted,
Thy daughter Damayantî weeps and grieves,
Lacking her husband. Even to me she spake
Before our damsels, laying shame aside:
'Find Nala! let the people of the court,
Strive day and night to learn where Nala is.'"

Then Bhima, hearing, called his Brahmanas,
Willing and wise, and issued hest to go
Into all regions, seeking for the Prince;
But first, by mandate of the Maharaj,
To Damayantî all those twice-born came,
Saying: "Now we depart!" Then Bhima's child
Gave ordinance: "To whatsoever lands
Ye wend, speak this,—wherever gather men,
Speak this,—in every place these verses speak:

"*Whither art thou departed, falsest lover,*
Who stole the half of thy beloved's cloth,
And left her to awaken and discover
The wrong thou wroughtest to the love of both.

"*She, as thou didst command, a sad watch keepeth,*
With woeful heart wearing the rended dress;
Prince! hear her cry, who thus for ever weepeth;
Be gentle, Hero! comfort her distress.

"And furthermore," the Princess said, "since fire
Leaps into flame when the wind fans the spark,
Be this too spoken, that his heart may burn:

"*By every husband nourished and protected*
Should every wife be. Think upon the wood!
Why these thy duties hast thou so neglected,
Prince! that wast called noble and true and good?

"*Art thou become compassionate no longer,*
Shunning, perchance, my fortune's broken way?
Ah! Husband, love is most! let love be stronger;
'Ahimsâ paro dharmas' * *thou didst say.*

* Signifying: "Kindness is chief of duties."

"These verses while ye speak," quoth the Princess,
"Should any man make answer, note him well,
In any place, and who he is, and where
He dwells. And if one listens to these words
Intently, and shall so reply to them,
Good Brahmans! hold ye fast his speech, and bring,
Breath by breath, all of it unto me here;
But so that he shall know not whence ye speak,
If ye go back. Do this unweariedly,
And if one answer, be he high or low,
Wealthy or poor, learn all he was, and is,
And what he doth."

Hereby enjoined, they went,
Those twice-born, into all the lands to seek
Prince Nala in his loneliness. Through towns,
Cities, and villages, hamlets and camps,
By shepherds' huts and hermit's caves they passed,
Searching for Nala; yet they found him not;
Albeit in every region (O my King!)
The words of Damayantî, as she taught,
Spake they again in hearing of all men.

SUDDENLY, after many days, there came
A Brahman home, Parnâda was he called,
Who unto Bhima's child in this wise spake:
"O Damayantî! seeking Nala still,
Ayodhya's streets I entered, where I saw
The Maharaj; he, Noble-minded one!
Heard me thy verses say, as thou hadst said;
Great Rituparna heard those very words,
Excellent Princess! but he answered nought;
And no man answered, out of all the throng
Ofttimes addressed. But when I had my leave,
And was withdrawn, a man accosted me
Privately, one of Rituparna's train,
Vahuka named, the Raja's charioteer,
Something misshapen, with a shrunken arm,
But skilled in driving; very dexterous
In cookery and sweetmeats. He with groans,
And tears which rolled and rolled, asked of my health,
And then these verses murmured wistfully:

"Even when their loss is largest, noble ladies
Keep the true treasure of their hearts unspent,
Attaining heaven through faith, which undismayed is
By wrong, unaltered by abandonment.

"Such an one guards with Virtue's golden shield
Her name from harm; pious, and pure, and tender;
And though her lord forsook her, will not yield
To wrath, even against that vile offender:

"Even against the ruined, rash, ungrateful,
Faithless, fond Prince, from whom the birds did steal
His only cloth—whom now a penance fateful
Dooms to sad days—that dark-eyed will not feel

"Anger;—for if she saw him, she should see
A man consumed with grief, and loss, and shame;
Ill or well lodged, ever in misery,
Her unthroned lord a slave without a name.

"Such words I heard him speak," Parnâda said,
"And, hastening thence, I tell them to thee here:

Thou knowest and wilt judge; make the king know."

But Damayantî listened with great eyes
Welling quick tears, while thus Parnâda spoke;
And afterwards crept secretly and said
Unto her mother: "Breathe no word hereof,
Dear mother, to the king, but let me speak
With wise Sudeva in thy presence soon.
Nothing should Bhima know of what I plan,
But, if thou lovest me, by thee and me
This shall be wrought. As I was safely led
By good Sudeva home, so let him go—
With none less happy fortune,—to bring back
Ere many days my Nala: let him seek
Ayodhya, mother dear, and fetch my Prince."

But first Parnâda, resting from his road,—
That best of twice-born,—did the Princess thank
With honourable words and gifts: "If home
My Nala cometh, Brahman," so she spake,
"Great guerdon will I give! Thou hast well done
For me herein; better than any man,

Helping me find again my wandered lord."
To which fair words made soft reply and prayers
For "peace and fortune" that high-minded one,
And so passed home, his service being wrought.

Next, to Sudeva spake the sad Princess,
This (O my King!)—her mother standing by:
"Good Brahman! to Ayodhya's city go;
Say in the ears of Raja Rituparn,
As though thou cam'st a simple traveller:
'The daughter of King Bhima once again
Maketh to hold her high Swayamvara;
The kings and princes from all lands repair
Thither; the time draws nigh; to-morrow's dawn
Shall bring the day. If thou wouldst be of it,
Speed quickly, conquering King! at sun-setting
Another lord she chooseth for herself;
Since whether Nala liveth or is dead
None knoweth.'"

These the words which he should say,
And, learning them, he sped and thither came,

That Brahmana Sudeva, and he spake
To Maharaja Rituparna so.

NOW when the Raja Rituparna heard
Sudeva's words, he said to Vahuka
Right pleasantly: "Much mind I have to go
Where Damayantî holds Swayamvara;
If to Vidarbha in a single day
Thou deemest we might drive, my charioteer!"

Of Nala, by his Master thus addressed,
Rent was the heart with anguish, for he thought:
"Can Damayantî purpose this? could grief
So change her? is it not some fine device
For my sake schemed? or doth my Princess seek,
All holy as she was, this guilty joy,
Being so wronged by me, her rash weak lord?
Frail is a woman's heart and my fault great;
Thus might she do it, being far from home,

Bereft of friends, desolate with long woe
Of love for me, my slender-waisted one!
Yet, no! no! no! she would not,—she that is
My children's mother! Be it false or true,
Best shall I know in going; therefore now
The will of Rituparna must I serve."

Thus pondering in himself, the troubled Prince
With joined palms meekly to his master said:
"I shall thy mind accomplish! I can drive
In one day, Raja, to Vidarbha's gates."

Then in the royal stables, steed by steed,
Stallions and mares, Vâhuka scanned them all,
By Rituparna prayed sudden to choose.
Slowly he picked four coursers, under-fleshed,
But big of bone and sinew; fetlocked well
For journeying, high-bred, heavy-framed; of blood
To match the best, yet gentle; blemish-free;
Broad in the jaw, with scarlet nostrils spread;
Bearing the *Avarthas*, the ten true marks;
Reared on the banks of Indus, swift as wind.

Which, when the Raja looked upon, he cried,
Half wrathful: "What thing thinkest thou to do?
Wilt thou betray me? How should sorry jades,
Lean-ribbed and ragged, take us all that way,
The long road we must swiftly travel hence?"

Vahuka answered: "See! on all these four
The ten sure marks; one curl upon each crest,
Two on the cheeks, two upon either flank,
Two on the breast, and on each crupper one.
These to Vidarbha—doubt it not—will go.
Yet, Raja, if thou wilt have others, speak,
And I shall yoke them."

Rituparna said:
"I know thou hast deep skill in stable-craft;
Yoke therefore such four coursers as thou wilt;
But quickly."

Then those horses, two by two,
High mettled, spare, and strong, Prince Nala put
Under the bars; and when the car was hitched,

And eagerly the Raja made to mount,
At sign the coursers bent their knees and lay
Along the earth. Then Nala (O my King!)
With kindly voice cheering the gaunt bright steeds,
Loosed them, and grasped the reins, and bade ascend
Varshneya: so he started headlong forth.

At cry of Vahuka the four steeds sprang
Into the air, as they would fly with him.
And when the Raja felt them, fleet as wind
Whirling along, mute sate he and amazed.
And much Varshneya mused to hear and see
The thundering of the wheels, the fiery four
So lightly held, Vahuka's matchless art;
"Is Mâtali, who driveth Indra's car,
Our charioteer? for all the marks of him
Are here; or Sâlihotra can this be,
The god of horses, knowing all their ways,
That here in mortal form his greatness hides?
Or is it, can it be, Nala the Prince,
Nala the steed-tamer?" Thus pondered he
"Whatever Nala knew, this one doth know;

Alike the mastery seems of both; alike
I judge their years. If this man be not he,
Two Nalas are there in the world for skill.
They say there wander mighty powers on earth
In strange disguises, who, divinely sprung,
Veil themselves from us under human mould;
Bewilderment it brings me, this his shape
Misshapen; from conclusion this alone
Withholds me; yet I know not what to think!
In age and manner one, and so unmatched
In form! else Vahuka I must have deemed
Nala, with Nala's gifts."

So, in his heart,
Varshneya watching, wondered, being himself
The second charioteer. But Rituparn
Sate joyous with the speed, delightedly
Marking the driving of the Prince; the eyes
Attent; the hand so strong upon the reins;
The skill so quiet, wise, and masterful;
Great joy the Maharaja had to see.

By stream and mountain, woodland path and pool,
Swiftly, like birds that skim in air, they sped;
Till, as the chariot plunged, the Raja saw
His shoulder-mantle falling to the ground;
And, loath to lose the robe, albeit so pressed,
To Nala cried he: "Let me take it up!
Check the swift horses, wondrous charioteer!
And bid Varshneya light and fetch my cloth."
But Nala answered: "Far it lies behind
A yojana already we have passed;
We cannot turn again to gather that."

A little onward Rituparna saw
Within the wood a tall myrobolan
Heavy with fruit; hereat eager he cried;
"Now, Vahuka! my skill thou mayest behold.
In the arithmic. All arts no man knows;
Each hath his wisdom, but in one man's wit
Is perfect gift of one thing and not more.
From yonder tree how many leaves and fruits
Think'st thou lie fallen there upon the earth?

Just one above a hundred of the leaves,
And of the fruits five score, unto a nut!
And on those two limbs hang of dancing leaves
Five crores exact; and should'st thou pluck yon boughs
Together with their shoots, on those twain boughs
Swing twice a thousand nuts and ninety-five."

Vahuka checked the chariot, wonderingly,
And answered: "Imperceptible to me
Is this thou boastest, slayer of thy foes;
But I to proof will put it, hewing down
The tree, and, having counted, I shall know.
Before thine eyes those branches twain I'll lop;
How prove thee, Maharaja! otherwise,
Whether this be or be not? I will tell—
One by one—fruits and leaves before thee, King!
Varshneya for a space can rein the steeds."

To him replied the Raja: "Time is none
Now to delay."

Vahuka answered quick—
(His own set purpose serving): "Stay this space,

Or by thyself drive on. The road is good;
The son of Vrishni will be charioteer!"

At this the Raja answered soothingly:
"There is not in the earth another man
That hath thy skill; and by thy skill I look
To reach Vidarbha, O thou steed-tamer!
Thou art my trust; make thou not hindrance now.
Yet would I suffer, too, what thou dost ask
If surely thou canst reach Vidarbha's gate
Before yon sun hath sunk."

Nala replied:
"When I have counted those Vibhîtak boughs,
Vidarbha I will reach; now keep thy word."

Ill-pleased the Raja said: "Halt then and count!
Take one bough from the branch which I shall show,
And tell its fruits, and satisfy thy soul."

So, leaping from the car, eager he shore
The bough and counted; and, all wonder-struck,

To Rituparna spake: "Lo, as thou said'st,
So many fruits there be upon this bough!
Exceeding marvellous is this thy gift;
I burn to know such learning, how it comes."

Answered the Raja, for his journey fain:
"My mind is quick in numbers, skilled to count;
I have that science."

"Give it me, dear Lord!"
Vahuka cried; "teach me, I pray, this lore;
And take from me my skill in horse-taming."

Spake Rituparn—impatient to proceed,
Yet of such skill desirous:—"Be it so!
As thou hast prayed, receive my secret art,
Exchanging with me thy deep mastery
Of horses."

Thereupon did he impart
His rules of numbers, and th' arithmic lore.

But wonderful! so soon as Nala knew

That hidden gift, the accursed Kali leapt
Forth from his breast, the evil spirit's mouth
Spewing the poison of Karkôtaka,
Even as it issued. From the afflicted Prince
That bitter plague of Kali passed away;
And for a space Prince Nala lost himself,
Rent by such agony. But when he saw
The evil one take visible shape again,
Freed from the serpent's poison, Nishadh's lord
Had thought to curse him there; but Kali stood
With clasped palms trembling, and besought the Prince,
Saying: "Thy wrath restrain! Sovereign of men!
I will repay thee well. Thy virtuous wife,
Indrasen's angered mother, laid her ban
Upon me, when thou didst forsake her: since
Within thee have I dwelled in anguish sore,
Tortured and tossed and burning, night and day,
With venom from the Great Snake's fang, which passed
Into me by thy blood. Be pitiful!
I take my refuge in thy mercy! Hear

My promise, Prince! wherever men henceforth
Shall name thee before people, praising thee,
This shall protect them from the dread of me;
NALA shall guard from KALI, if so now
Thou spare to curse me, seeking grace of thee."

Thus supplicated, Nala stayed his wrath,
Acceding; and the direful Kali fled
Into the wounded tree, possessing it.
But of no eyes save Nala's was he seen,
Nor heard of any other; and the Prince
His sorrows shaking off—when Kali passed,
After that numbering of the leaves—in joy
Unspeakable, and glowing with new hope,
Mounted the car again, and urged his steeds.
But from that hour the tall myrobolan
Possessed by Kali, stood there sear and dead.

Then, onward—onward—speeding like the birds,
Those coursers flew; and fast and faster still
The glad Prince cheered them forward, all elate;
And proudly rode the Raja toward the walls

Of far Vidarbha. Thus he journeyed down—
Exultant Nala—free of trouble now,
Quit of the evil spell, but bearing still
His form misshapen and the shrunken limb.

AT sunset in Vidarbha (Good my Liege!)
The watchers on the walls proclaimed: "There comes
The Raja Rituparna!" Bhima bade
Open the gates; and thus they entered in,
Making all quarters of the city shake
With rattling of the chariot-wheels. But when
The horses of Prince Nala heard that sound,
For joy they neighed, as when of old their lord
Drew nigh. And Damayantî in her bower
Far off that rattling of the chariot heard—
As when, at time of rain, is heard the voice
Of clouds low-thundering—and her bosom thrilled
At echo of that ringing sound. It came
Loud and more loud, like Nala's, when, of old,
Gripping the reins, he cheered his mares along.

It seemed like Nala to the Princess, then,
That clatter of the trampling of the hoofs;
It seemed like Nala to the stabled steeds;
Upon the palace-roof the peacocks heard
And screamed; the elephants within their stalls
Heard it and trumpeted; the coursers tied
Snorted for joy to hear that leaping car:
Peacocks and elephants and cattle stalled
All called and clamoured with uplifted heads,
As wild things do at noise of coming rain.

Then to herself the Princess spake: "This car,
The rolling of it, echoing all around,
Gladdens my heart! It must be Nala comes,
My chief of men! If I see not this day
My Prince, that hath the bright and moon-like face;
My hero of unnumbered gifts, my lord;
Ah, I shall die! If this day fall I not
Into his opening arms at last—at last!
And feel his close embrace, oh, beyond doubt,
I cannot live! If, ending all, to-day
Nishadha comes not, with these ringing wheels

Like far-off thunder, then to-night I'll leap
Into the golden, flickering, fiery flames!
If now—now—now—my lion draws not nigh,
My warrior, strong as the wild elephant,
My Prince of princes, I shall surely die.
Nought call I now to mind he said or did
That was not rightly said and justly done;
No idle word he spoke, even in free speech;
Patient and lordly, generous to bestow
Beyond all givers;—scorning to be base,
Yea, even in secret; such Nishadha was.
Alas! when day and night I think of him,
How is my heart consumed, reft of its joy!"

So meditating, like one torn by thoughts,
She mounted to the palace-roof to see;
And thence, in the mid-court, the car beheld
Arriving: Rituparn and Vahuka
She saw, with Vrishni's son, descend and loose
The panting horses, wheeling back the car.

Then Rituparn, alighting, sought the king,

Bhima the Maharaja, far-renowned,
Whom Bhima with fair courtesies received;
For well he deemed such breathless visit made
With deep cause, knowing not the women's plots.
"*Swâgatam!*" cried he, "what hath brought thee, Prince?"
For nothing wist he that the Raja came
Suitor of Damayantî. Questioned so,
This Raja Rituparna, shrewd as brave—
Seeing no kings nor princes in the court,
Nor noise of the Swayamvara, nor crowd
Of Brahmans gathering, weighing all those things—
Answered in this wise: "I am come, great Lord!
To make thee salutations!" But the king
Laughed in his beard at Rituparna's word,
That this of many weary yojanas
Should be the mark! "*Ahoswid!* hath he passed
Through twenty towns," thought he, "and hither flown
To say good-morrow? Nay, it is not that!
Well, I shall know it when he tells it me."

Thereat, with friendly speech his noble guest

The king to rest dismissed. "Repose thyself,"
Quoth he; "the road was long; weary thou art!"
And Rituparn, with sentences of grace
Replying to this graciousness, was led
By slaves to his allotted sleeping-rooms;
And after Rituparn Varshneya went.
Vahuka, left alone, the chariot ran
Into its shed, and from the foamy steeds
Unbuckled all the harness, thong by thong,
Speaking soft words to them; then sate him down,
Alone, forgotten, on the driving-seat.

But Damayantî, seeing Rituparn,
And Vrishni's son, and him called Vahuka,
Spake sorrowful: "Whose was the thunder then
Of that fleet car? It seemed like Nala's own,
Yet here I see no Nala! Hath yon man
My lord's art learned, or the other one, that thus
Their car should thunder as when Nala comes?
Could Rituparna drive as Nala doth,
So that those chariot-wheels should sound like his?"

And, after having pondered (O my King!),
The beauteous Princess sent her handmaiden
To Vahuka, that she might question him.

"GO, Keshinî!" the Princess said, "inquire
Who is that man upon the driving-seat,
Misshapen, with the shrunken arm: approach
Composedly, question him winningly
With greetings kind, and bid him answer thee
According to the truth. I feel it here—
A doubt, a hope—that this, perchance, maybe
My Lord and Prince; there is some new-born joy
Fluttering within my breast. Accost him, girl;
And, 'ere thou partest, what Parnâda said
Say thou, and hear his answer, blameless one!
And bring it on thy lips!"

Then went the maid
Demurely, and accosted Vahuka
While Damayantî watched them from the roof.

"*Kûshalam tê bravîmi!* health and peace
I wish thee!" said she. "Wilt thou answer true
What Damayantî asks? She sends to ask
Whence set ye forth and wherefore are ye come
Hither? Vidarbha's Princess fain would know."

"'Twas told my Raja," Vahuka replied,
"That Damayantî, for the second turn,
Holds her Swayamvara: the Brahman's word
Was 'This shall be to-morrow:' so he sped,
My Raja, on that news, with steeds which fly
A hundred yojanas, swift as the winds,
Exceeding fleet! His charioteer am I."

"Who then," Keshinî asked, "is he that rode,
The third? whence cometh he, and what his race?
And thou thyself whence sprung? and tell me why
Thou servest thus?"

Then Vahuka replied:

"Varshneya is the third who rode with us,
The famous charioteer of Nala he;

When thy Prince fled he went to Koshala
And took our service. I, in horse-taming
And dressing meat have skill, so am I made
King Rituparna's driver and his cook."

"Knoweth Varshneya, then, where Nala fled?"
Inquired the maid, "and did he tell thee this,
Or what spake he?"

"Of that unhappy Prince
He brought the children thither, and then went
Even where he would, of Nala wotting naught;
Nor wotteth any man, fair damsel! more.
Hidden from mortal eyes Nishadha lives,
Wandering the world, his very body changed:
Of Nala only Nala's own heart knows,
And by no sign will he bewray himself."

Keshinî said: "That Brahman, who did wend
First to Ayodhya, bore a verse to say
Over and over everywhere: strange words,
Made by a woman's wit. List unto them:

"Whither art thou departed, falsest lover!
Who stole the half of thy belovëd's cloth;
And left her to awaken and discover
The wrong thou wroughtest to the love of both?

"She, as thou didst command, a sad watch keepeth,
With woeful heart wearing the rended dress;
Prince! hear her cry, who thus for ever weepeth;
Be gentle, hero! comfort her distress!"

"What was it thou didst utter, hearing this?
Some gentle speech!—say it again! the queen
My peerless mistress, fain would know from me.
Nay, on thy faith! when thou didst hear that man,
What was it thou replied'st? She would know."

(Descendant of the Kurus!) Nala's heart—
While so the maid spoke—well-nigh burst with grief,
And from his eyes fast flowed the rolling tears;
But mastering his anguish, holding down
The passion of his pain, with voice which strove
To speak through sobs, the Prince repeated this:

"*Even against the ruined, rash, ungrateful,*
Faithless, fond Prince, from whom the birds did steal
His only cloth, whom now a penance fateful
Dooms to sad days—that dark-eyed will not feel

"*Anger;—for if she saw him, she should see*
A man consumed with grief, and loss, and shame;
Ill or well lodged, always in misery,
Her unthroned lord a slave without a name."

Speaking these verses, woeful Nala moaned,
And, overcome by thought, restrained no more
His welling tears; fast broke they forth (O King!).
But Keshinî returning, told his words
To Damayantî, and the grief of him.

WHEN Damayantî heard, sore troubled still,
Yet in her heart supposing him her Prince,
Again she spake: "Speed, Keshinî! and watch
Whatever this man doeth; near him stand,
Holding thy peace, and mark the ways of him,
And all his acts, going and coming; note

If aught there be of strange in any deed.
Let them not give him fire, my girl! not though
This hindereth sore; nor water, though he ask
Even with beseeching. Afterward observe,
And bring me what befalls, and every sign
Of earthly or unearthly power he shows;
And whatsoever else Vahuka doth,
See it and say."

Thereon Keshinî sped,
Obeying Damayantî; and, at hand,
Whatever by that horse-tamer was wrought,
The damsel watched; and all his ways, and came
Back to the Princess, unto whom she told
Each thing Vahuka did, as it befell,
And what the signs were and the wondrous marks
Of earthly and unearthly gifts in him.

"Certes!" quoth she, "the man is magical,
But high and holy-mannered. Never yet
Saw I another such, nor heard of one!
Passing the low door of the inner court,

Where we must stoop, he did not bow his head,
But as he came the lintel lifted up
And gave him space! Bhima the king had sent
Many and diverse meats for Rituparn,
Of beast and bird and fish—great store of food—
For cleansing which the chatties stood hard by,
All empty; yet he did but look on them,
Wishing, and lo! the water brimmed the pots!
Then having washed the meats, he hasted forth
In quest of fire, and holding towards the sun
A knot of withered grass, the bright flame blazed
Instant amidst it! Wonderstruck I was
This miracle to see, and hither ran
With other stranger marvels to impart;
For, Princess! when he touched the blazing grass
He was not burned, and water flows for him
At will, or ceases flowing. And this, too,
The strangest thing of all, did I behold:
He took some faded leaves and flowers up
And idly handled them, but while his hands
Toyed with them, lo! they blossomed forth again
With lovelier life than ever, and fresh green,

Straight on their stalks! These marvels have I seen
And hastened back to tell thee, Mistress dear."

But when she knew such wonders of the man,
More certainly she deemed those acts and gifts
Betokened Nala; and, so minded, full
Of trust to find her lord in Vahuka,
With happier tears and softening voice she said
To Keshinî: "Run yet again, my girl!
And, while he wots not, from the kitchen take
Meat he hath dressed and bring it here to me."
So went the maid, and, waiting secretly,
Brake from the mess a morsel, hot and spiced,
And bearing it with faithful swiftness, gave
To Damayantî. She (O Kuru King!)
That knew so well the dishes dressed by him,
Touched—tasted it—and, laughing, weeping, cried,
Beside herself with joy: "Yes, yes! 'tis he!
That charioteer is Nala!" Then, a-pant—
Even while she washed her mouth *—she bade the maid

* Damayantî would not neglect the religious obligation to wash the lips after eating, although in a moment of such emotion.

Go with the children twain to Vahuka;
Who, when he saw his little Indrasen
And Indraseua, started up and ran,
And caught, and folded them upon his breast,
Holding them there, his darlings, each as fair
As children of the gods: then, quite undone
With love and yearning, loudly sobbed the Prince.

Until,—perceiving Keshinî, who watched,—
Shamed to be known, he set his children down,
And said: "In sooth, good friend, this lovely pair
So like mine own are, that, at seeing them,
I am surprised into these foolish tears.
Thou comest here too often; men will think
Thee light, or me: remember we are here
Strangers and guests. Go thy ways, girl! in peace!"

BUT seeing that great trouble of his soul,
Lightly camé Keshinî and pictured all
To Damayantî. She, burning to know
If truly this were Nala, bade the maid

Seek the Queen's presence, saying this for her:
"Mother! long watching Vahuka, I deem
The charioteer is Nala! One doubt lives,—
His altered form. I must myself have speech
With Vahuka; thou, therefore bid him come,
Or suffer me to seek him. Be this done
Forthwith, good mother, whether known or not
Unto the Maharaja."

When she heard,
The Queen told Bhima what the Princess prayed,
Who gave consent; and having thus good leave
From father and from mother (O my King!)
Command was sent that Vahuka be brought
Where the court-ladies lodged.

So met those twain!
And when Prince Nala's gaze fell on his wife,
He stood with beating heart and tearful eyes:
And when sweet Damayantî looked on him,
She could not speak, for anguish of keen hope
To have him close; but sate there, mute and wan,

Wearing a sad-hued cloth, her lustrous hair
Falling unbanded, and the mourning-mark
Stamped with grey ashes on her lovely brow.

Then, when she found a voice, these were the words
That came from her: "Didst ever, Vahuka!—
If Vahuka thy name be, as thou sayest,—
Know one of noble nature, honourable,
Who in the wild woods left his wife asleep,—
His innocent fond wife, weary and worn?
Knowest thou the man? I'll say his name to thee;
'Twas Nala, Raja Nala! Ah! and when
In any thoughtless hour had I once wrought
The smallest wrong that he should leave me so
There in the wood by slumber overcome?
Before the gods I chose him for my lord;
The gods themselves rejecting: tell me how
This Prince could so abandon in her need
His true, his loving wife, she who did bear
His babes,—abandon her to whom he swore,
My hand clasped, in the sight of all the gods,

Of Agni's self: 'Thy true lord I will be!'
Thou saidst it; where is now that promise fled?"

While thus she spake (O Conqueror of thy Foes!)
Fast from her eyes the woe-sprung waters ran;
And Nala, seeing those night-black loving eyes
Reddened with weeping, seeing her falling tears,
Brake forth: "Ah! that I lost my throne and realm
In dicing, was not done by deed of mine:
'Twas Kali wrought it! Kali, O my wife!
Drave me to leave thee! Therefore, long ago
That evil one was stricken by the ban
Which thou didst utter, wandering in the wood,
Desolate, night and day grieving for me.
Possessing me he dwelt; but, cursed by thee,
Tortured he dwelt, consuming with thy words
In fierce and fiercer pain, as when is piled
Brand upon burning brand. But he is gone!
Patience and penance have o'ermastered him.
Princess! the end is reached of our long woes!
That evil one being parted, freeing me,
See, I am here! and wherefore would I come

Fairest! except for thee? Yet answer this;
How should a wife, right-minded to her lord,—
Her own and lawful lord,—compass to choose
Another love, as thou, that tremblest, didst?
Thy messengers over all regions ran
By the king's name proclaiming: 'Bhima's child
A second husband chooseth for herself,
Whomso she will, as pleaseth, being free.'
Those shameless tidings brought the Raja here
At headlong speed—and me!"

Tenderly smiled
Damayantî through her tears, with faltering lips
And joined palms answering her aggrievëd Prince:
"Judgest thou me guilty of such a sin?
When for thy sake I put the gods aside,
Thee did I choose, Nishadha! my one lord.
In quest of thee did all those Brahmans range
In all ten regions, telling all one tale,
Taught them by me; and so Parnâda came
To Koshala, where Rituparna dwells,
And found thee in his house, and spoke to thee

Those words, and had thy gentle answer back.
Mine the device was, Prince! to bring thee quick;
For well I wist no man in all this world
Could in one day the fleetest coursers urge
A hundred yojanas save thee, dear Prince!
I touch thy feet and tell thee this is truth;
And true it is that never any wrong
Against thee, even in fancy, have I dreamed.
Witness for me, as I am loyal and pure,
The ever-shifting, all-beholding Air,
That wanders o'er the earth; let him withdraw
My breath and slay me, if I sinned in aught!
Witness for me yon golden Sun which goes
With bright eye over us; let him withhold
Warm life and kill me, if I sinned in aught!
Witness for me the white Moon, whose pale spell
Is on all flesh and spirit; let that orb
Deny me peace and end me, if I sinned!
These be the Watchers and the Testifiers,
The three chief Gods that rule the three wide worlds;
I cry unto them! let them speak for me;

And thou shalt hear them answer for my faith,
Or once again, this day, abandon me."

Then Vayu shewed—the all-enfolding Air—
And spake: "Not one wrong hath she wrought thee, Prince!
I tell thee sooth, the treasure of her truth
Faultless and undefilëd she hath kept,
By us regarded, and sustained by us
These many days. Her tender plot it was,
Planned for thy sake, which brought thee; since who else
Could in one day drive fivescore yojanas?
Nala! thou hast thy sweet leal wife again;
Thou, Damayantî! hast thy Nala back:
Away with doubtings! take her to thy breast,
Thrice-happy Prince!"

And while great Vayu spake
Look! there showered flowers down out of the sky
Upon them; and the drums of heaven beat
Beautiful music; and a gentle wind,—

" Fragrant, propitious—floated, kissing them.
But Nala, when he saw these things befall,—
Wonderful, gracious,—when he heard that Voice
Divinely sounding (Lord of Bhârat's line!)
Yielded all doubt of his delightful love.
Then cast he round about his neck the cloth—
Unstained by earth, enchanted—and (O King!)
Called the great snake to memory: whereupon
His proper self returned. Bhima's fair child
Saw her dear lord his stately form resume.
" Ah, Nala! Nala!" cried she, while her arms
Clasped him and clung; and Nala to his heart
Pressed that bright lady—glowing, as of old,
With princely majesty. Their children twain
Next he caressed; while she, at happy peace,
Her beautiful glad face laid on his breast,
Sighing with too much joy. And Nala stood
A great space silent, gazing on her face,
Sorrow-stamped still, her long deep-lidded eyes,
Her melting smile: himself 'twixt joy and woe.

Afterwards, all that story of the Prince,

And all of Damayantî, Bhima's queen
Told to the Maharaja joyously;
And Bhima said: "To-morrow will I see—
When Nala hath his needful offerings made—
Our daughter and this wandering lord well knit."

But all that night they sat, hand clasped in hand,
Rejoicing, and relating what befell
In the wild wood, and of the woeful times.
And afterwards in Bhima's royal house
Serenely dwelled the Princess and the Prince,
Each making for the other peaceful joy.
So, in the fourth year, Nala was rejoined
To Damayantî, comforted and free,
Restful, attained, tasting delights again.
Also the glad Princess, gaining her lord,
Laid sorrows by, and blossomed out anew,
As doth the laughing earth when the rain falls,
Bringing her unseen hidden treasures forth
Of blade and flower and fruit. The ache was gone,
The loneliness and load! Heart-full of ease

Lovelier she grew and brighter, like the moon
Mounting at midnight in the cloudless blue.

THAT night being spent, Prince Nala in his state
Led forth Vidarbha's pride before the court;
And Bhima, in an hour found fortunate,
Re-wed those married lovers. Dutifully
Nala paid homage to the Maharaj,
And reverently did Damayantî bow
Before her father. He the Prince received
With grace and gladness, as a son restored,
Making fair welcome, and with words of praise
Exalting Damayantî, tried and true;
Which in all dignity Prince Nala took,
Returning, as was meet, words honourable.
Thereat into the city spread the noise
Of this rejoicing; all the townspeople,
Learning of Nala joyously returned,
Made all their quarters gay with float of flags,
Flutter of cloths and garlands; sprinkled free

The king's ways with fresh water and with cups
Of fragrant flowers, and hung long wreaths of flowers
From door to door the white street-fronts before;
And decked each temple-porch, and went about
The altar-gods.

When Rituparna heard
How Vahuka is Nala in disguise,
And of the meeting, right-rejoiced at heart
That Raja grew. And being softly prayed
By Nala favourable thoughts, the king
Made royal and gentle answer, with like grace
By Nala met. To whom spake Rituparn:
"Joy go with thee and her, happily joined!
But say, Nishadha! wrought I anything
Wrongful to thee whilst sojourning unknown
Within my walls? If any words or deeds,
Purposed or purposeless, have vexed thee, friend!
For one and all thy pardon grant to me!"

And Nala answered: "Never act or word
The smallest, Raja! need'st thou to excuse!

If this were otherwise, thy slave was I,
And might not question, but must pardon thee.
Yet good to me thou wert, princely and just,
And kin thou art; and, friendly from this time
Deign thou to be. Happily was I lodged,
Well tended, well befriended, in thy house;
In mine own palace never better stead!
The skill in steeds which pleased thee, that is mine;
And, Raja! I will give it all to thee,
If thou be'st minded."

So Nishadha taught
All his great gift in horses to the king,
Who heard each rule approved, and ordinance;
And having gained this knowledge, gave in turn
His deepest lore of numbers and the dice
To Nala, afterwards departing home
To his own place, another charioteer
Driving his steeds; and Rituparna gone,
Not long did Nala dwell in Bhima's town.

WHEN one moon he had dwelled there, (taking leave,)
Nishadha to his city started forth
With chosen train. A shining car he drove;
And elephants sixteen, and fifty horse,
And footmen thirty score, came in the rear.
Swiftly did Nala journey, making earth
Quake with his flying car, and wrathfully
With quick steps entered he his palace doors.
The son of Vîrasena, Nala, stood
Once more before the gamester Pushkara!
Spake he: "Play yet again! much wealth is mine,
And that, all which I have—yea, my Princess—
Set I for stakes. Set thou this realm and throw!
My mind is fixed a second chance to try,
And, Pushkara! we will play for all or none.
Who wins his throne and treasures from a Prince
Must stand the hazard of the counter-cast;
This is the accepted law. If thou dost blench,
The next game we will play is 'life or death'
In chariot fight, when, or of thee or me
One shall lie satisfied: 'Descended realms

"By whatsoever means are to be sought,'
The sages say, 'by whatsoever won.'
Choose therefore, Pushkara! which way of these
Shall please thee! either meet me with the dice,
Or with thy bow confront me in the field."

When Pushkara that heard, lightly he smiled,
Concluding victory sure; and to the Prince
Answered exulting: "*Dishtya!** hast thou gained
Stakes for a counter-game, Nishadha, now?
Dishtya! shall I have my hard-won prize,
Sweet Damayantî? *Dishtya!* didst thou come
In kissing-reach again of thy fair wife?
Soon, in thy new gold splendid, she shall shine
Before all men beside me, as in heaven
On Sakra waits the loveliest Apsarâ.
See now, I thought on thee, I looked for thee,
Ever and ever, Prince! There is no joy
Like casting in the game with such as thee.
And when to-day I win thy blameless one,

* An exclamation of pleasure and surprise.

The smooth-limbed Damayantî, then shall be
What was to be, and I can rest content;
For always in my heart her beauty lives."

Listening the idle talk that babbler poured,
Angry Prince Nala fain had lopped away
His head with vengeful khuḍga, but unmoved,
Albeit the wrath blazed in his bloodshot eyes,
He made reply: "Play! mock me not with jests;
Thou wilt not jest when I have cast with thee!"

Then was the game set, and the Princes threw,
Nala and Pushkara; and—the numbers named—
By Nala was the hazard gained: he swept
His brother's stake,—gems, treasure, kingdom,—off;
At one stroke all the mighty venture won.

Then quoth that conquering Prince to Pushkara,
Scornfully smiling: "Mine is now once more
Nishadha's throne; mine is this realm again,
Its curse plucked forth; Vidarbha's glory thou,
Outcast! shall ne'er so much as look upon!
Fool! who art now become her bond and slave

Not by thy gifts that evil stroke was wrought
Wherefrom I fled before; 'twas Kali's spell,
Albeit thou knew'st not, fool! o'ermastered me.
Yet will I visit not in wrathful wise
My wrong on thee; live as thou wilt! I grant
Wherewith to live, and set apart henceforth
Thy proper goods and substance, and fit food.
Nay, doubt not I shall show thee favour too,
And be in friendship with thee, if thou wilt,
Who art my brother. Peace abide with thee!"

Thus all-victorious Nala comforted
His brother and embraced him, sending him
In honour to his town; and Pushkara—
Gently entreated—to Nishadha spake,
With folded palms and humbled face, these words:
"Unending be thy glory! may thy bliss
Last and increase for twice five thousand years,
Who grantest me wherewith to live, just lord!
And where to dwell." Thereafter, well bested,
Pushkara sojourned with the Prince one moon,
So to his town departed, heart-content,

With slaves and foot-soldiers and followers,
Gay as a rising sun (O Bhârat's Glory!):
Thus sent he Pushkara, rich and safe, away.

Then, with flags and drums and jewels, robed and royally arrayed,
Nala into fair Nishadha entry high and dazzling made;
At the gates the Raja halting, spake his people words of love,
Gathered were they from the city, gathered from the field and grove;
From the mountain and the maidan, all athrill with joy to see
Nala come to guard his children. "Happy now our days will be,"
Said the townsfolk, said the elders, said the villagers; "O king!"
Standing all with palms upfolded: "peace and fortune thou wilt bring
To thy city, to thy country; boundless welcome do we give,

As the gods in heaven to Indra when with them He comes to live."

After, when the show was ended, and the city, calm and glad,
Rest from tumult of rejoicing and its flood of feasting had,
Girt with shining squadrons Nala fetched his Pearl of Women home:
Like a queen did Damayantî back unto her palace come;
By the Maharajah Bhima, by that mighty monarch sent
Royally, with countless blessings, to her kingdom in content:
There, beside his peerless Princess and his children, bore he sway
Godlike; even as Indra ruling 'mid the bliss of Nandana,
Bore he sway, my noble Nala, princeliest of all lords who reign
In the lands of Jambudwipa, winning power and fame again;

Ruling well his realm re-conquered, like a just and perfect king,

All the appointed gifts bestowing, all the rites remembering.

END OF NALA AND DAMAYANTÎ.

THE ENCHANTED LAKE.

From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahábhárata, page 825, line 17,305, of the Calcutta 4to text.

—o—

[*In the section preceding the five Pandu Princes have been wandering in the forest, greatly distressed for want of water. The concluding portion of this translation illustrates a passage in my previously published version of the "Swargârohana," where the god Dharma praises the King Yudhisthira for his equity and self-denial.*]

THEN Yudhisthira spake to Nakula:

"Thou Son of Madri! climb upon a tree.
And look to all ten quarters, if, by chance,
Water be nigh, or plants which love the pool;
Thy brothers faint with thirst."

So Nakula
Clomb a tall tree; and looking, cried aloud,
"Green leaves and water plants I see, which love
The marish and the pool; also, I hear
The cry of cranes; yonder will water lie!"

"Go!" said the King, "and fetch for us to drink,
Filling thy quiver."

Then sped Nakula,
Obeying Yudhisthira with swift feet,
And found a crystal pool brimmed to the bank:
The great red-crested cranes stalked on its marge.
And down he flung to drink; but a Voice cried,
"Beware to drink, rash youth! ere thou hast made
Answers to such things as I ask of thee;
The law of this fair water standeth thus:
Arise, and hear, and speak; afterwards drink,
And fill thy quiver."

But the eager Prince
Being so parched, quaffed deep, not heeding him,

The Yaksha of the place, and thereupon
Fell lifeless in the reeds.

So when they looked
To see him coming, and he tarried long,
Again spake Yudhisthira: "Nakula
Lingers too much, my brothers!—Sahadev!
Go thou; and bring him back, and bring to drink."

"I go," quoth Sahadev; and sought the pool,
And saw the water, and saw Nakula
Prone on the earth. Then mightily he grieved,
Spying the Prince outstretched; yet, all so fierce
His drouth was, that he ran and flung him down,
Making to quaff; when, once again, the Voice
Sounded, "Beware to drink, ere thou dost give
Answer to what things I will ask of thee;
This is the law of me, who am the Lord
Of the fair water; rise, and hear, and speak;
Then thou shalt drink, and draw."

Yet, so the stress
Of thirst o'ercame him, that he heeded not,

But drank, and rose, and—reeled among the reeds
Lifeless.

Then, once again, great Kuntî's son
Spake, saying: "O Arjuna! Fear of foes!
These, our twain brethren, tarry: go thyself,
And speed, and bring them back, and bring to drink;
Our trust thou art, for we are sore distressed."

Which hearing, Gudâkeśa * seized his bow
And arrows, and with drawn sword sought the pool.
But coming thither saw those heroes stretched—
His brethren, best of men,—in deadly swoon,
Or dead indeed; and deep distraught he stood,
Seeing them thus. All round the wood he gazed,
With lifted bow, and arrow on the string,
Seeking some foe; but when none came in sight,
So wild his thirst was, and the pool so clear,
He bent his knee to drink, but bending, heard
That Voice cry, "Dost thou this without my leave?
Despite me, Kuntî's son! thou canst not drink,
And shalt not, till thou makest answers good

* "He of the knotted locks," a name of Arjuna.

Unto my asking; then may'st thou be free,
Oh, born of Bhârata! to drink and draw."

Thus sternly stayed, the Prince exclaimed in wrath:
"Come forth and show thyself, and fight with me!
Pierced by my arrows thou shalt yield the pool."
Then shot he shafts this way and that; and spoke
Those spells which make a feathered barb fly straight;
And darts he flung, of magic might, which find
Th' escaping foe, tracking his winding feet;
Karnis, Narâchas, Nâlikas he threw,
That angry Prince, covering the sky and wood
With searching steel. Thereat the Voice anew
Mock'd him, low-laughing: "Son of Pritha! vain
Thine anger is; answer me fair, and drink;
But if thou drinkest ere thou answerest,
Thou shalt not live." Yet was his throat so parched
The Prince regarded not; and stooped, and drank,
And fell down dead.

Then Yudhisthira spake:
"Bhima! thou Terror of thy foes! see now!

Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadev are gone ..
To fetch us water; but they come not back.
Seek them, and bring to drink."

And Bhima said,
"So be it;" and he went unto the place
Where those, his mighty-hearted brethren, lay.
But when he saw them—all three—dead and stark,
Sore grieved that long-armed Lord, and gazed around,
Deeming some Yaksha or some Rakshasa
Had wrought their doom, and chafing for the fight.
"But first," quoth he, "'twere good to drink,"—so sore
The drouth oppressed,—and to the pool he sped,
Thinking to quaff, when yet again that Voice
Echoed, "Dare not to drink—so stands the law
Of this fair water; answer first—then drink!"
But Bhima, parched and haughty, answered naught,
Lapping the sweet wave; and in lapping fell.

Then, long time left alone, Kuntî's wise son
Uprose—great Yudhisthira—sorrowful,

Perplexed in thought; and strode into the wood:
A leafy depth, where never foot was heard
Of man, but shy deer roamed, and shaggy bears
Rustled, and jungle-hens clucked in the shade;
With tall trees crowded, in whose crown the bees
Swarmed buzzing, and strange birds builded their nests.
Through this green darkness wending, Yudhisthir
Passed to the pool, and marked its silver face
Shine in the light, rimmed round with golden cups
Of lotus-blossoms, all as if 'twere made
By Viswakarma, architect divine;
And all its gleaming shallows and bright bays
With water-plants were broken, lilies, reeds;
And framed about with ketuk-groves, and clumps
Of sweet rose-laurel and the sacred fig;
Insomuch that the King stood wondering there,
Albeit heart-sorrowful.

For there he saw,
Stretched dead together—as the world's lords die,
Indra and all, at every Yuga's end—

His warrior brethren. There Arjuna lay,
Beside his bow and arrow; Bhima there,
With Nakula and Sahadev; each void
Of life and motion; and beholding these,
His soul sank, and he fetched a grievous sigh.
Bitterly at that sight lamented he,
Saying, "Ah, Bhima! O my brother! named
From the grim wolf; vain is the vow thou mad'st
To break the thigh of fell Duryodhana
In battle with thy mace. Dead art thou now,
And those words wind. Brother and faithful friend!
Who wast so princely-hearted, and upheld'st
The fortune of the Kurus! vows of men
Fail ofttimes, being blind; but this of thine
Was noble, wherefore hath it borne not fruit?
O Dhananjaya! Conqueror of wealth!
My joy, my brave Arjuna! at thy birth
The glad gods said to Kuntî: 'This thy son
Shall be like Indra with the thousand eyes.'
And northwards of the Paripatra hills
All people cried: 'Here is the chief shall bring
The glory back to us, having such strength

That in the battle none will make him fly,
And none shall stand when he pursueth.' How—
Ah, Jishnu!—how is this befallen here,
Killing those hopes with thee,—with thee, whose love
Made all our dangers sweet? And Sahadev,
And Nakula! so valiant in the fight,
So high and gallant, gifted like the gods,
How have ye fallen? who could conquer you?
Is my heart stone that now it breaketh not,
Seeing these great twins gone, the first of men,
Heroes, the half of whose renownèd work
Was yet to do? Ye knew the Shastras—knew
The times and places and observances,
And kept the rites; how lie ye on the earth,
Unconquered ones! thus slain, thus overcome,
And not a wound to show—nay! but the strings
Not slipped into the notches of your bows?"

So broke the sorrow forth from Yudhisthir
Beholding all four brethren lying still,
Prone, like four corpses set asleep by Death;
Much grieved he, and the marvel chilled his blood:

Nor wist he, though so wise, whither to look
For that which slew them. Yet, close-pondering,
Unto himself he spake: "No hurts they bear
Made by a mortal weapon, nor is print
Of footmark nigh, save theirs; this is some Bhut!
Some Spirit of the Waste!—But let me drink,
And afterward consider; it may be
The vile Duryodhana hath drugged the pool,
By counsel of Gandhâra's king; the wise
Trust never him with senses unsubdued,
To whom things lawful and unlawful count
One and the same; yea! but this thing may be
Wrought by hid hatred of Duryodhana."

Thus mused the King, but murmured presently:
"Pure and unsullied seems the water; fresh
My brothers' faces are; no poison-stain
Mars limb or lip! 'tis Yama's self hath come,
The conqueror of all, and slain them here,
Whom none but he dared strike, being so strong."

So saying, to the brink he drew, athirst,
And stooped to drink;—when, close at hand, he heard

A bird's cry, and the Yaksha, taking shape,
Spake: "A grey crane I am, feeding on fish
And water-weeds; 'tis I have sent yon four
Unto the regions of the dead, and thou
Shalt go, the fifth, great Raja! following them,
Except thou makest answers fair and good
To all that I shall ask. Dare not to drink,
Thou Son of Kunti! for my law is strong;
Answer; and afterwards, drink thou, and draw!"

Spake Yudhisthir: "Who art thou? Art thou chief
Of Rudras, or of Vâsus, or Maruts?
Tell me! No bird wrought thus, unless a bird
Might overthrow Himavân, and the peaks
Of Paripatra, or the Vindhya crags,
Or Malabar's black ghâts. Ah! terrible
And mighty One, this is a dread deed wrought!
This is a marvel, if thou slewed'st those
Whom Gods, and Gandharvas, and Asuras,
And Demons dared not face in fight. I know
Naught of thy mind, nor if thou didst this thing

Desiring aught; wonder and fear possess
My burdened heart! I pray thee, show thyself,
Reveal what God thou art, who hauntest here."

"Yea, King!" came answer; "I am not a bird
Wading the shallows, but a Yaksha dread,
And I, as now thou seest me, killed these four."

Raja! (so Vaisampayana went on),
When Yudhisthira heard those scornful words,
And saw that form, backward he drew a space,
Gazing upon the Shape with eyes of flame,
Bulked like a crag, with towering head which topped
The fan-palms waving near; shining as shines
The glory of the sun, not to be borne
For splendour; coloured like an evening cloud,
And like a cloud still shifting. Then it spake,
That monstrous Shade: "These four, though I forbade,
Drank of the pool, despite me, and were slain.
Drink not, O King! if thou desirest life;
O Son of Pritha, drink not! Kuntî's child!
Answer my questionings, then drink, and live!"

"I would not break thy rule," quoth Yudhisthir;
"The wise have said, 'Keep everywhere the law,'
And, Yaksha! wherein thou wilt question me
None can speak better than he understands;
So, what I know, that will I answer. Ask!"

Then thus he questioned, and the King replied:—

Yaksha.

What teacheth division 'twixt spirit and frame?
And which is the practice assisteth the same?
What finally freeth the spirit? And how
Doth it find a new being? Resolve me these now.

King.

The Veds division plainly show;
By worship rightly man doth go;
Dharma the soul will surely free;
In Truth its final rest shall be.

Yaksha.

How cometh a man in the Veds to be wise?

What bringeth the knowledge of God to his eyes?
What learning shall teach him the uttermost lore?
And whence will he win it? Reply to these four.

King.

By hearing Scripture man acquires;
By doing it his soul aspires;
The utmost lore is conquering sense,
Which cometh of obedience.

Yaksha.

How wendeth a Brahman to heavenly rest?
And what is the work that befitteth him best?
And which are the sins that disgrace him? and why
Doth he know himself humble and mortal? Reply!

King.

Reading the Vedas leads to rest;
Pure meditation fits him best;
Slander and cruelty defame;
And Death marks him and all the same.

Yaksha.

Who is it that gifted with senses to see,
To hear, taste, smell, handle; and seeming to be
Sagacious, strong, fortunate, able, and fair;
Hath never once lived, though he breatheth the air?

King.

The man who, having, doth not give
Out of his treasure to these five—
Gods, guests, and Pitris, kin and friend;
Breathes breath, but lives not to life's end?

Yaksha.

What thing in the world weigheth more than the world?
What thing goeth higher than white clouds are curled?
What thing flieth quicker than winds o'er the main?
And what groweth thicker than grass on the plain?

King.

A mother's heart outweighs the earth;
A father's fondness goeth forth
Beyond the sky; thought can outpass
The winds, and woes grow more than grass.

Yaksha.

Whose eyes are unclosed, though he slumbers all day?
And what's born alive without motion? and, say,
What moveth, yet lives not? and what, as it goes,
Wastes not, but still waxes? Resolve me now those.

King.

With unclosed eyes a fish doth sleep;
And new-laid eggs their place will keep;
Stones roll; and streams, that seek the sea,
The more they flow the wider be.

. . . . . .

Yaksha.

What help is the best help to virtue? and, then,
What way is the best way to fame among men?
What road is the best road to heaven? and how
Shall a man live most happy? Resolve me these now.

King.

Capacity doth virtue gain;
Gift-giving will renown obtain;
Truth is to heaven the best of ways;
And a kind heart wins happy days."

Yaksha.

What soul hath a man's which is his, yet another's?
What friend do the gods grant, the best of all others?
What joy in existence is greatest? and how
May poor men be rich and abundant? say thou.

King.

Sons are the second souls of man,
And wives the heaven-sent friends; nor can

Among all joys health be surpassed;
Contentment answereth thy last."

Yaksha.

Which Virtue of virtues is first? and which bears
Most fruit? and which causeth the ceasing of tears?"

King.

To bear no malice is the best;
And Reverence is fruitfullest;
Subduing self sets grief at rest.

Yaksha.

Still, tell me what foeman is worst to subdue?
And what is the sickness lasts lifetime all through?
Of men that are upright, say which is the best?
And of those that are wicked, who passeth the rest?"

King.

Anger is man's unconquered foe;
The ache of greed doth never go;

Who loveth most of saints is first;
Of bad men cruel men are worst."

. . . . .

Yaksha.

Good Prince! tell me true, is a Brahmana made
By birthright? or shall it be rightfully said,
If he reads all the Veds, and the Srutis doth know,
He is this? or doth conduct of life make him so?"

King.

O Yaksha! listen to the truth:
Not if a man do dwell from youth
Beneath a Brahman's roof, nor when
The Srutis known to holy men
Are learned, and read the Vedas through,
Doth this make any Brahman true.
Conduct alone that name can give;
A Brahmana must steadfast live,
Devoid of sin and free from wrong;
For he who walks low paths along,

Still keeping to the way, shall come
Sooner and safer to his home
Than the proud wanderer on the hill;
And reading, learning, praying, still
Are outward deeds which ofttimes leave
Barren of fruit minds that believe.
Who practises what good he knows
Himself a Brahmana he shows;
And if an evil nature knew
The sacred Vedas through and through,
With all the Srutis, still must he,
Lower than honest Sudra be.
To know and do the right, and pay
The sacrifice, in peace alway,
This maketh one a Brahmana."

Yaksha.

Right skilfully hast thou my questionings met,
Most pious of princes and learned! but yet
Resolve me who liveth though death him befall?
And what man is richest and greatest of all?

King.

Dead though he be, that mortal lives
Whose virtuous memory survives;
And richest, greatest, that one is
Whose soul—indifferent to bliss
Or misery, to joy or pain,
To past or future, loss or gain—
Sees with calm eyes all fates befall,
And, needing nought, possesseth all.

Then spake the Yaksha: "Wondrously, O King!
Hast thou replied, and wisely hast fulfilled
The law of this fair water; therefore drink!
And choose which one of these thy brethren dead
Shall live again."

So Yudhisthira said,
"Let Nakula, O Yaksha! have his life—
My dark-browed brother with the fiery eyes—
Straight like a Tala-tree, broad-chested, tall,
That long-armed lord."

"But see where Bhima lies
Dead," spake the Spirit, "dearest unto thee;
And where Arjuna sleeps, thy guard and guide!
Why dost thou crave the life of Nakula—
Not thine own mother's son—in Bhima's stead,
Who had the might of countless elephants,
Whom all the people called thy 'Well-Beloved?'
Or wouldst thou see Nakula alive again
In place of great Arjuna, thine own blood,
Whose valour was the tower of Pandavas?"

But Yudhisthira answered: "Faith and right,
Being preserved, save all, and, being lost,
Leave nought to save: these therefore I will set
First in my heart. Faithful and right it is
To choose by justice, putting self aside.
Let Nakula live, O Yaksha! for men call
King Yudhisthira 'just;' nor will he lose,
Even for love, that name; make Nakula live!
Kuntî and Madrî were my father's wives;
Shall one be childless, and the other see
Her sons returning? Madrî is to me

As Kuntî, as my mother, at this hour;
As she who bore me she that bore the twins;
And justice shall she have, since I am judge;
Let Nakula live, thou Yaksha!"

Then the Voice
Sighed sweet, evanishing: "Thou noblest Prince!
Thou best of Bhârat's line! as thou art just,
Lo!. all thy brethren here shall live again."

THE SAINT'S TEMPTATION.

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahábhárata, p. 565, line 10,007, Calcutta 4to edition.]

—o—

BORN of the White Doe, in the woods he dwelled,
That sinless saint, pious and mild and pure,
Sad-minded, solitary; for his eyes
Had never lighted on a human face
Except his sire, Vibhandika's; and thus
Always young Rishyasringa's heart was set
On sanctities (O King!).

At which far time
Lomapâd, friend of Dasarath, was lord
In Anga; and, 'tis told, spake falsely once
Unto a Brahmana. But, thereupon

The Brahmans fled from that dishonoured court;
So, when no priest was left, no Purohit,
He of the thousand eyes, Indra, withheld
His rains, whereby sore suffered all the folk;
And (O my King!) Lomapâd sent in grief,
Praying his wisest if they knew the cause
Of Indra's wrath, and what should make Him rain.

Thus questioned, these took counsel; and one spake—
A chief of sages—"O Superior Lord!
The Brahmanas are angered for thy word
Forsworn; thou therefore make them fit amends,
And hither bring Rishyasring, who dwells
Alone amid the groves, holy and mild;
Whose eyes have never seen a woman's face;
Whose heart is pure. If the fair boy shall come,
The clouds of Indra will let fall their drops
That very day; of this thing doubt ye not!"

Hearing their words the Raja purged his guilt
With lavish gifts, soothing the Brahmanas;

And when their hearts were won, he came again
Unto his kingdom, making all folks glad.
And, next, the Lord of Anga called his best
Among the ministers to compass means
How Rishyasringa might be brought; and those,
Deep-read in Shastra, Artha, Niti, all,
Counselled the wiles of woman;—whereupon
A band of comely winsome girls were bid
Unto the palace, skilled in arts to please;
And the king said: "Beautiful damsels! bring
Rishyasringa hither, that saint's son;
Entice, allure, persuade: ye know men's hearts."
But they, fearing the king, yet fearing more
The saint's curse if they vexed him, one by one
Answered: "Yea, Raja! hearts of men we know,
But in this thing how can we serve thy will?"

Then one arose, white-haired and wrinkled deep,
An ancient dame, who spake unto the king:
"See, Maharaja! I will fetch this boy,
Albeit an ocean of austerities.
Do thou command that there be granted me

Means for my need, that so I may prevail,
And bring the Rishi's son, this pearl of saints."

"What needest thou?" said he; and when he knew,
Much store of silver and of gold and gems
He gave the dame, who from the ring of girls,
Laughing, drew forth the fairest, wilfullest;
And muttering "He will come!" passed to the woods.

And there she built—so Lomarsha went on—
Not by the king's word, but her own device,
A floating bower to swim upon the stream.
Full sweet she fashioned it, from woven boughs
Of verdure, interlaced with palms and vines,
And clasped by climbing stems, and hung with fruit
Golden and rosy, and with bright blooms decked;
Afterwards on the river launched her boat—
The damsel seated 'neath its leafy screen—
So that it came with paddle, stream, and breeze,
Through the trees stealing, down the silvery road,
Softly and silent, to the Rishi's haunt;

Where lightly tripped the lovely girl ashore,
And looking in his eyes, demurely spake:

"O Muni! is it peace with you? are all the Rishis
well?
And have you roots and fruits enough? and take you
joy to dwell
All lonely in this hermitage, which I am come to
see?
And add you, day by day, dear saint! unto your
sanctity?
And, Brahman! doth your sire rejoice to watch you
fast and pray?
And do you sing, O Rishyasring! the Vedas every
day?"

Answered that blushing boy delightedly:

"O unknown one! who shinest like the splendour
of a star,
Peace and good-will! for due to thee my salutations
are.

Accept, I pray thee, at my hands, the *Padya*,* and this thrift
Of roots and fruits, as duty bids, a hermit's humble gift:
And be thou pleased upon this mat of Kusa grass to sit,
Or, better, let the black deer's skin be smoothly spread on it:
Fair is the day which bringeth thee! Ah, sweet saint, where may be
Thy hermitage, and what vow fills the holy hours of thee?"

Right archly answered him the laughing girl:

"Oh, son of pious Kaśyapa! my charming bower lies
Under a mountain far removed from these austerities,
Three yojanas away,—away;—nor is it meet for me
Thus to be reverenced, nor to touch this water, nor to see
A Rishi kneeling at my feet; much otherwise my state!
Love is the vow which fills my life and makes my heart elate."

* Water for the feet; a necessary and graceful part of Hindoo hospitality.

Perplexed, yet radiant, the boy replied:

"What should I do to pleasure thee? I'll bring thee
fruits we find
Within our groves, Bhallatakas, Ingudas with gold rind,
Karushakas, Amalakas, Dhanwanas honey-sweet,
Or Pippalas; see! these are here; wilt thou not take
and eat?"

But smilingly she put them by, and reached
Rare cakes to him, spiced as no hermit knows,
Pleasant of taste, which the boy ate with joy.
And on his neck and wrists lightly she hung
Garlands of subtle-scented blooms; and crowned
Her own bright brows; and drew a light robe on,
Laughing; and so, with murmuring song, unbound
Her body-cloth, and waving, weaving it,
Paced the soft Kanduka with beating feet,
And bosoms lithely swayed, as flower-cups sway
When the wind shakes their clusters; at the last
Danced to his side, and for a moment set
Palm to his palm, and limb to limb, and lip

To trembling lip, and breast to beating breast:
Then turned aside and drew the branches down
Of Sarja, Tilak, and Aśoka trees,
Plucking their buds, shameless and well-content,
Because she saw love lighted in his heart.

For knowing well her triumph, and the saint
Obtained,—once more she clasped her soft brown arms
About him, and with eyes fixed on his eyes
Withdrew; having enkindled passion's flame
Where only fires of sacrifice had burned.

WHEN she was gone, young Rishyasringa stood
As one some dream of glory leaves distraught,
Spiritless; then within his lonely cell
Sate with face fixed through many silent hours,
Her beauties meditating.

Presently
Vibhandaka, of Kaśyapa the son,
Returned. Much insight of the Veds had bleared

His ancient orbs; a thick pile covered him,
Body and legs and arms, to the finger-ends:
A holy man, purified, dedicate
To contemplation. He, arriving, saw
The lad in deep thought plunged, sitting apart,
Dejected, fetching sigh on sigh, with glance
Upturned. Whereat inquired Vibhandaka:
"My child! why hast thou gathered not the wood?
Didst thou perform the sacrifice to-day?
And didst thou lead the calf to suck the cow?
Why art thou sad? I pray thee tell me true,
Hath one been with thee here to-day?"

The boy
Gave answer: "Yea! a Brahmacharya came,
His locks were braided and his comely form
Seemed not too tall nor short; fair-voiced he was,
Coloured as is new gold, with broad bright eyes,
Which were like lotus-blossoms. As gods shine
So of his own divine grace glittered he.
A glory had he like the sacred sun;
And, ah! his dark deep glance; and oh! his hair

Tied up with blue; sweet-smelling, lustrous, long!
A necklace curled and clung about his neck
Sparkling like lightning on a dusky sky;
And underneath his throat swelled forth to sight
Two globes, flower-soft and smooth, fair-fashioned, large;
His waist so fined that back and front came close;
Below his hips outrounded wondrously;
A jewelled girdle hung above his thighs,
And some strange tinkling ornaments adorned
His feet. Also upon his arms were gems,
Which chattered like the breast-beads of my string,
Ah! but more musically, when he moved;
'Twas as the songs of wild swans on the lake!
The cloths he wore were goodly, not like mine,
And when he spoke, those honeyed words which fell
Gladdened my heart and passed into my soul,
Deep—deep! till dearer seemed it than the notes
Of Koïls piping! Also, as the woods
When in the Madhva month the breezes blow,
Shake fragrance forth, so there did waft from him
Sweet breaths on every air! Over his brows

The locks sate smooth, drawn forward from his braids,
And in his ears swung little painted stones
Brighter than Chakravâka birds! Sometimes
With skilful hand he tossed a fruit aloft,
Which fell to earth, and bounding to his palm,
Was beaten back again and yet again,
Wondrous to see! while this and that way waved
His body like a tree which the wind bends.
Ah! while I saw him so, like a young god,
My heart grew full! I worshipped that fair Saint!
Full oft, too, he embraced me, holding me
Close by the hair, and, drawing down my cheek,
And, covering up my mouth with his soft mouth,
Upon my lips made tender sounds; and this
Wrought me strange joy! He would not willingly
Accept 'foot-water,' nor the fruits I brought,—
He had a vow was otherwise, he said,—
But gave me unknown fruits, more delicate
Than aught we ever taste of here; no rind
They had, nor pulp like ours. Also he gave
Sweet juices to me, which I drank, and felt
A quickening glow, lifting my eyebrows up.

Those wreaths of scented blossoms strung with silk
Are from his hand; he left them here, dear saint!—
Who by his fasts, no doubt, so splendid shows—
When he withdrew to seek his hermitage.
Now he is gone, I am become as nought;
My senses fail, my body burns! I ask
Only to go to him, or else that he
Should ever come to us. Father! demand
His presence: learn his Brahmacharya's name!
I wish to exercise with that wise man
The penance they perform: I long to do it!
My heart will break if I see him no more!"

Vibhandaka spake sternly: "Son! there walk
Wonderful Rakshasâs in this our wood,
Dreadful for strength and cunning comeliness;
Ofttimes to interrupt our rites they seek;
Ofttimes, with winsome wiles and beauteous shapes,
Tempt saints to abandon Swarga's heavenly mark.
He who will rule his mind and reach toward bliss
With such makes no society, nor looks
The way of these, the abominable, who snare

The pious. Yea, my son! those drinks she gave
Are evil and forbidden, and conduce
To sin. Yon wreaths, moreover, must not lie
Within a hermitage where Munis live;
For soul-compelling is their subtle scent.
Nay, 'twas a Rakshasî!"

So did the sage
Counsel that youthful saint, admonishing him,
And afterwards set forth to seek the witch:
But, nowhere finding her, came home again.

Yet it befell, upon another day,
Vibhandaka went forth to pluck those fruits
Which are most meet to make the sacrifice
Of Śravan, and she came again, the girl,
Silently shining through the trees. And he
Saw her, and, seeing, utterly forgot
Rishis and Rakshasîs, so joyed he was,
So with strong love transported; for she sighed
"Rishyasring!" and with that word he took
Her palm, and led her to the lonely hut,
Whose porch they entered.

Afterwards (O King!)
Laughingly did she win him to the bank
With honeyed arts, and lightly him entrance,
Floating and fondling down the silvery stream
Until they came to Anga. There she drew
The green boat in, and moored it 'neath the shade,
Love's ark—plain to be seen, and by all folk
Named *Navyaśrama*, 'The Floating Shrine.'

So Lomapâd brought in the Rishi's son:
And lo! great Indra's wrath was gone; the rain
Burst o'er the land and drenched the thirsty fields;
But Rishyasringa to his forest cell
Came back no more!

THE BIRTH OF DEATH.

From the *Drona Parva* of the Mahábhárata, line 2040, page 606, vol. iv., Calcutta 4to edition.

—o—

[*The brave and virtuous son of Arjuna and Subhadra, the young Abhimanyu, has been slain in battle, after splendid exploits; and Prince Yudhisthira is bitterly bewailing that loss. "What is death? Whence is this death?" he exclaims. The sage Vyâsa thus replies to him:*]

I.

I WILL relate
An ancient story for thy comfort, Prince,
By Narad told to King Akampana!
For that great lord had lost his only son,

Which is of earthly woes hardest to bear.
Thou, too, shalt learn how death began, and this
Shall free thee from the ache of love bereaved.
Hear the old story; it is sweet to hear—
Excellent, holy, purging sins away,
Prolonging life because it stayeth grief;
Good for the heart and soul, strengthening the will,
Best of auspicious scriptures. Nay, I say
To tell or hear this read is all as if
The blessed Veds were chanted; it should be
Said with the morning prayer for kings to con,
If they will keep their children, realms, and wealth
With minds at ease.

My son, in ages past,
In the far Krita Yuga, lived this King
Akampana. His foes beset him sore,
And slew in fight Hari, his son, a Prince
God Narayen's match, for might; youthful and fair;
Skilful in arms, wise, pleasant—in the war
Fearless as Sákra. But they hemmed him round,
Striking such blows amidst his enemies,

That when he fell there lay about his corpse
A bloody belt of chiefs and elephants.

. .

Long mourned the King his sire, by night and day
Weeping, knowing no joys, uncomforted;
Whom that most holy saint, great Narada,
Hearing his grief, in pity visited.
But when the King saw Narad entering,
Uprose he from the dust, and clasped those feet,
And poured his sorrows into those wise ears,
Recounting all the battle, how 'twas lost,
And how the Prince fell. "Ah! my brave, fair son"—
So broke he forth—"Oh! my most gallant boy!
That wast upon our side like Indra's self
For help, like Vishnu in thy shining mail,
Slain art thou 'midst thy foes. Ah! Bhagavan,
Ah! Rishi, he is gone; my pride is dead!
What is this death? whence cometh it? what curse
Hath given it means and might and power to kill,
Blasting the bloom of life? Thou, who art wise,
Tell me the truth of this; I crave to know."

Then Narad, hearing his most piteous cry,
That teacher of all truth, spake tenderly
The ancient tale I tell, which whoso hears
He shall not weep though his one son be dead.

Narada said: "Listen, thou long-armed king,
And grieve no more when thou hast heard. At first,
Long back in the beginning, He who rules,
Almighty Shining Brahma, made what lives
To be unchanged; so was there length of days
Illimitable, but not growth in days
Which comes by change; and Brahma, seeing His worlds
Fixed in fair changelessness, waxed ill content,
Bethinking to unmake what He had made,
That good should pass to better. And there went,
O monarch! from the discontent of Him—
Bethinking how He should destroy to save—
A flame, the spirit of His brooding thought,
Which, filling all the regions, had consumed
The heavens and earth and worlds from west to east—
From north to south, the heavens and earth and worlds,
With all their creatures—those which live and move,

And those which live unmoving, plants and trees.
So was that thought of Brahma terrible.

But thereupon he of the matted locks,
Hara—whom men do also Sthánu call,
King of night-wandering ghosts, Shiva the god—
Unto dread Brahma's presence straight repaired.
Awful in sunlike majesty sat He;
And seeing Hara at His feet, come there
For love of living beings: "Son!" He said,
"What need hath brought thee? Let the wish be known;
That which thou dost desire, it shall be wrought;
For thou art Sthánu, and thy will is mine."

Spake Hara: "O thou Light of all the Worlds!
Thine are the worlds, and thou hast peopled them;
And all things in their orders are by Thee,
And in Thee live. Wilt thou not save Thine own?
But now they fear to perish everywhere,
Slain by this fire which flameth from Thy mood;
And I, who see it, and who love them, come,
Moved with compassion. Have thou mercy, Lord!"

Brahma replied: "I did not think to slay.
Lo! I am favourable. Life shall live:
For love, not hate, this mood did move in me;
Because the Angel of the Earth hath come,
Constantly praying: 'Father, lighten me!
Make and unmake this burden sore to bear,
My children, lest we multiply to harm.'
Yet, having made them, how should I unmake,
Seeing I gave gifts indestructible,
Giving their lives? I cannot slay, yet these
Must change; therefore that mood did move in me."

Spake Hara, "O Protector of the Worlds!
Be favourable still, be wroth no more;
Let not the lives, moving and motionless,
Perish, O Bhagavan! Let there be henceforth
Three states of time for children of the earth,
The Past, the Present, and the Future; these
Let them possess, Thou Lord of All! Thy mind
Burneth in moving, and therewith a flame
Proceeded, scorching mountains, rivers, lakes,
Forests and beasts that dwell there, and the beings

Moving and motionless, of all the earth.
Ah! Bhagavan, be thou then propitious; yield
Thine ill content which slayeth. This I crave.
Also the flame, which hath proceeded forth
By reason of it; draw it back, dread Lord,
Into Thyself; from Thee it sprang; Thou art
Master to bless or ban. Make Thine acts bless
These that are Thine to sweep away or save,
These that must perish if Thou pity not.
O Maker who unmakest! I am here—
The messenger of all the guardian gods
Which keep thy worlds—beseeching Thee, Supreme,
Destroy not that which Thou hast wrought so fair!
For this at Thy great feet I bend and plead."

Hearing Mahâdev's prayer (quoth Narada)
The awful Brahma gave consent, and drew
Back to Himself that earth-devouring flame.
Then He who maketh and unmaketh worlds
Spake of the making and unmaking—how
The purpose groweth so. And when the fire
Was wholly quenched, and all His spirit still,

Lo! Brahma meditated; and there rose,
Live from His thought, a Presence feminine—
Delicate, tender, splendid, with great eyes.
Dark the sweet face was, dark the stately limbs;
But beauty blossomed red on lip and breasts,
And in her ears swung ear-rings of soft gold.
She, being so born, drew backward from the throne,
Awestruck to gaze upon those Gods. But He
Who maketh and unmaketh spake to her
Saying, "Thou Death, thou Mrityu—go, destroy
Those who must die! I have created thee
Unto this work; bring to appointed end
The moving and unmoving; kill and slay
All creatures at their time. This is my will,
Obey, and fear not."

Thus commanded, Death—
Fair Mrityu, with those eyes like lotuses—
Spake not, but bowed her head and sobbed, her tears
Fast welling; so that on dread Brahma's hand
Fell the bright tears; for Brahma drew her close,
Saying "I bid thee for the good of all."

II.

But Narada went on: Then she assuaged
Her sorrow, and replied, "Father and Lord!"
Clasping her palms across her beauteous breast,
And trembling like a tendril in the wind—
"Father and Lord," sighed Mrityu, "wherefore then
Mad'st Thou me woman? How shall I fulfil
This dreadful duty, this injurious task?
I shall be guilty, I shall be defiled.
Be gracious; let this work light not on me!
Why must they die? the friend, the citizen,
The son, the mother, father, brother, bride
And bridegroom—all so happy, all so fair—
Why should these be destroyed? I am afraid
To kill them; I shall sadden at their tears,
Grieve with their groans. Master of all! dear God!
Bid me not dwell with Yama, slaying men.
I pray Thee rather give me leave to live
In holy silences and pains and prayers.
This boon I crave, great Father; grant the boon;
And I, thy child, will go to Dhenuka,

Where I will dwell in sacred solitudes,
Religious, worshipping thee. But, God of gods,
I shall not have the heart to take away
The dear lives of the dying creatures. Save,
Save me from such a sin!"

Brahma replied:

"Mrityu! thou art created unto this,
To make an end of all that lives. Go, child!
Make them to end, each at his time; spare none!
Such is my will, and never otherwise;
Thou shalt be blameless, doing Brahma's will."

But she—thus Narada went on—stood there
To slay reluctant, clasping pitying palms
Across her breast, and lifting eyes of ruth
To Brahma's eyes. Thereat there spread in heaven
Silence a space, whilst Death, for love of men,
Gazed on the face of God, and that dread face
Waxed well contented; and great Brahma smiled
Looking upon His creatures, who therewith

Fared well throughout the three wide worlds, because
The countenance of Him was glad again.

So passed she from the Almighty Presence, mute,
This tender angel sent to slay mankind,
Refusing still to slay; and forthwith went
To Dhenuka, where, countless ages through,
In meditation and rapt vows she stood
Fixed like a rock. All for the love of men
For sixteen padmas stood she, seeking grace,
Withholding heart and soul from peace and joy;
And afterward for padmas twenty-five
Praying for men; and then through many more
She sojourned with the creatures of the field,
Praying for them. Next, upon Nanda's banks,—
Nanda which flows cool, holy, crystal, pure,—
Seven thousand years and one kept she firm fast,
And afterwards went east to Kausikî,
Where dews and airs of heaven were all her food;
Until, accomplishing the pilgrimage,
By Panchaganga and at Ganga's wave,
Under the feet of sacred Himalay,
And so to topmost Himalay, where gods

Have offered sacrifice, she, too, a god,
Lay prostrate, praying, still as is a stone;
And yet again at Naimish, Pushkara,
Gokarna and Malaya, wheresoe'er
The holiest places are, there sojourned she,
Fasting and meditating, making vows
For men to Brahma, suing him for them.

Whereby the Eternal Father of the worlds,
Being well pleased—quoth Narad—called to her
With kindly mind, saying, "My Mrityu!
Why dost thou exercise such heavy vows?"

And gentle Death answered the Lord of life:
"That I may never have, O Lord! to kill
Thy creatures, and that they may dwell in peace,
This thing I ever wish, this boon I crave.
Master and Father! I did fear the guilt
Of slaying, and I feared to disobey;
Therefore I make these penances, Supreme!
Comfort me who am Thine, and terrified;
Forgive me, for I would be innocent;
Have pity Lord of lords on me and these!"

Then He Who knows what was, is, and will be,
Made mild reply: "Blood-guilty art thou not,
O Mrityu! if thou slayest these which live.
What I have uttered, I have uttered. Vain
Can never be my words. These are to die.
Go, gentle spirit! therefore, slay me these;
Slay all four orders of the things which live;
Thee shall the Eternal Virtue purify;
Thee shall the Mighty Ones, who guard my worlds,
Succour and aid. Yama shall help thee; plagues,
Pestilence, dearth, shall be thy ministers;
And I, the Almighty God, before all gods
Give thee this sign, that, being free from sin,
Thou shalt be called 'Passionless,' *Nirajî*,
She that doth slay for love, and slaying saves."

So once again, commanded past reply,
Mrityu her meek palms folded o'er her breast,
And bowed her brow, and answered: "If, dread Lord,
This must be done, and I must be the means,
Upon my head be put Thine high behest!
Yet let it be Thy will I strike them not;

Let their sins slay them, and die so with them.
Avarice, ambitions, envies, calumnies,
Wars, wraths, hates, conquests, follies, passions, plots
Of mutual mischiefs—let those work Thy word
And bring to end the beings suffering them."

"Thus it shall be," spake Brahma. "Go, fair child
Fulfil My purpose, make death enter so;
Thou shalt be blameless now and evermore.
See! the bright tears that fell upon my hand
From forth thine eyes, I turn to woes of flesh
Which shall consume them—aches, diseases, griefs.
Born of thy sorrow these will smite; but, born
Of thy compassion, these shall heal with peace,
When the day cometh that each one must die.
Fear not! thou shalt be innocent; thou art
The solace as the terror of all flesh,
Righteous and rightful, doing Brahma's will.
Therefore fare forth and slay, making these end
With pangs of passion, stings of wild desires,
Vain sins which kill. Such shall thy virtue be;
And thou shalt purify thee by thyself,

Making the good wax and the evil wane
By nature of the evil's self—by wrongs,
By wrath, by lust, self-love, and sinfulness."

So, ever since that time—quoth Narada—
Mrityu, no longer thinking to resist,
Works the great will of God, and slays what lives,
Taking the breath of creatures at life's close;
Not with her own kind hand;—she doth not kill!
By ills and pests and hurts which evil breeds—
As many as those tender tears that rolled
Forth from her eyes—they perish; so men call
Their plagues *Vyâdhi*, that which "hunts" to death.

Wherefore, my King! said Narad, it is vain
To mourn the dead. The elements divine,
Which enter in at birth come forth at death.
All changes, and the gods are mortal, too.
But thou, lament no more thy princely son;
He hath attained that excellent abode,
Airy, invisible, which knows not time,
Nor chance, nor any change. Weep not for him;

He sits with kings and heroes who are passed
Into the everlasting happy house,
Where no wars are, nor wounds; and good men dwell.

King! this is Death! this is that Mrityu!
Thus—when the hour is come—the creatures end,
Obeying the vast purposes of Him
Who maketh and unmaketh. Mrityu takes
Their breath. She slays not; of themselves they die.
The gentle Spirit with the staff in hand
Strikes none, but succours all. Therefore the wise,
Knowing that such is Brahma's will, and good,
Never lament their dead; grieve thou no more!

And when the holy Narada made end,
(Vyâsa said,) this King Akampana
Shed no more tears, but spake unto the Saint:
"Lo! now my woe is gone, my heart is healed!
Oh! wisest of all Rishis, I have peace;
I thank thee for the blessing of such lore;
I clasp thy feet." Therewith Narada went

To Nandana, leaving him comforted.
Son of the Pandavas, be patient too!
Thy prince, thy gallant Abhimanyu,
Fell like a lord of men, and hath his meed
In Swarga with the blessed. Rise thou up,
Quit grief, and take thy weapons, and renew
The battle with thy brothers on the plain.

Whoso reads and whoso hears,
This fair story of old years,
Well and wisely gives his pains;
Since thereby his spirit gains
Piety and peace and bliss;
Nay, and heavenward leadeth this;
And, on earth, its wisdom brings
Wealth and health and happy things.

THE NIGHT OF SLAUGHTER.

From the *Sauptika Parva* of the Mahábhárata.

—o—

To Narayen, Best of Lords, be glory given,
To great Saraswati, the Queen in Heaven;
Unto Vyása, too, be paid his meed,
So shall this story worthily proceed.

"THOSE vanquished warriors then," Sanjaya said,
"Fled southwards; and, near sunset, past the tents,
Unyoked; abiding close in fear and rage.
There was a wood beyond the camp,—untrod,
Quiet,—and in its leafy harbour lay
The Princes, some among them bleeding still
From spear and arrow-gashes; all sore-spent,

Fetching faint breath, and fighting o'er again
In thought that battle. But there came the noise
Of Pandavas pursuing,—fierce and loud
Outcries of victory,—whereat those chiefs
Sullenly rose, and yoked their steeds again,
Driving due east; and eastward still they drave
Under the night, till drouth and desperate toil
Stayed horse and man; then took they lair again,
The panting horses, and the Warriors, wroth
With chilled wounds, and the death-stroke of their
King.

"Now were they come, my Prince," Sanjaya said,
"Unto a jungle thick with stems, whereon
The tangled creepers coiled; here entered they—
Watering their horses at a stream—and pushed
Deep in the thicket. Many a beast and bird
Sprang startled at their feet; the long grass stirred
With serpents creeping off; the woodland flowers
Shook where the peafowl hid, and, where frogs plunged,
The swamp rocked all its reeds and lotus-buds.
A banian-tree, with countless dropping boughs

Earth-rooted, spied they, and beneath its aisles
A pool; hereby they stayed, tethering their steeds;
And dipping water, made the evening prayer.

"But when the 'Day-maker' sank in the west
And Night descended—gentle, soothing Night,
Who comforts all, with silver splendour decked
Of stars and constellations, and soft folds
Of velvet darkness drawn—then those wild things
Which roam in darkness woke, wandering afoot
Under the gloom. Horrid the forest grew
With roar, and yelp, and yell, around that place
Where Kripa, Kritavarman, and the son
Of Drona lay, beneath the banian-tree,
Full many a piteous passage instancing
In their lost battle-day of dreadful blood;
Till sleep fell heavy on the wearied lids
Of Bhoja's child and Kripa. Then these Lords—
To princely life and silken couches used—
Sought on the bare earth slumber, spent and sad,
As houseless outcasts lodge.

"But, O my King!
There came no sleep to Drona's angry son,
Great Aswatthâman. As a snake lies coiled
And hisses, breathing, so his panting breath
Hissed rage and hatred round him, while he lay,
Chin uppermost, arm-pillowed, with fierce eyes
Roving the wood, and seeing sightlessly.
Thus chanced it that his wandering glances turned
Into the fig-tree's shadows, where there perched
A thousand crows, thick-roosting, on its limbs;
Some nested, some on branchlets, deep asleep,
Heads under wings—all fearless; nor, O Prince!
Had Aswatthâman more than marked the birds,
When, lo! there fell out of the velvet night,
Silent and terrible, an eagle-owl,
With wide, soft, deadly, dusky wings, and eyes
Flame-coloured, and long claws, and dreadful beak;
Like a winged sprite, or great Garood himself.
Offspring of Bhârata! it lighted there
Upon the banian's bough; hooted, but low,
The fury smothering in its throat;—then fell
With murderous beak and claws upon those crows,

Rending the wings from this, the legs from that,
From some the heads, of some ripping the crops;
Till, tens and scores, the fowl rained down to earth
Bloody and plucked, and all the ground waxed black
With piled crow-carcases; whilst the great owl
Hooted for joy of vengeance, and again
Spread the wide, deadly, dusky wings.

"Up sprang
The son of Drona: 'Lo! this owl,' quoth he,
'Teacheth me wisdom; lo! one slayeth so
Insolent foes asleep. The Pandu Lords
Are all too strong in arms by day to kill;
They triumph, being many. Yet I swore
Before the King, my Father, I would "kill"
And "kill"—even as a foolish fly should swear
To quench a flame. It scorched, and I shall die
If I dare open battle; but by art
Men vanquish fortune and the mightiest odds.
If there be two ways to a wise man's wish,
Yet only one way sure, he taketh this;
And if it be an evil way, condemned

For Brahmans, yet the Kshattriya may do
What vengeance bids against his foes. Our foes,
The Pandavas, are furious, treacherous, base,
Halting at nothing; and how say the wise
In holy Shasters?—"Wounded, wearied, fed,
Or fasting; sleeping, waking, setting forth,
Or new arriving; slay thine enemies;"
And so again, "At midnight when they sleep,
Dawn when they watch not; noon if leaders fall;
Eve, should they scatter; all the times and hours
Are times and hours fitted for killing foes."'

"So did the son of Drona steel his soul
To break upon the sleeping Pandu chiefs
And slay them in the darkness. Being set
On this unlordly deed, and clear in scheme,
He from their slumbers roused the warriors twain,
Kripa and Kritavarman."

THE GREAT JOURNEY

[From the *Mahaprasthânika Parva* of the Mahabhárata.]

—o—

To Narayen, Lord of lords, be glory given,
To sweet Saraswati, the Queen in Heaven,
To great Vyása, ekc, pay reverence due,
So shall this story its high course pursue.

THEN Janmejaya prayed: "Thou Singer, say,
What wrought the princes of the Pandavas
On tidings of the battle so ensued,
And Krishna, gone on high?"

Answered the Sage:
"On tidings of the wreck of Vrishni's race,
King Yudhishthira of the Pandavas

Was minded to be done with earthly things,
And to Arjuna spake: 'O noble Prince,
Time endeth all; we linger, noose on neck,
Till the last day tightens the line, and kills.
Let us go forth to die, being yet alive.'
And Kuntî's son, the great Arjuna, said:
'Let us go forth to die!—Time slayeth all;
We will find Death, who seeketh other men.'
And Bhimasena, hearing, answered: 'Yea!
We will find Death!' and Sahadev cried: 'Yea!
And his twin brother Nakula:' whereat
The princes set their faces for the Mount.

"But Yudhishthira—ere he left his realm,
To seek high ending—summoned Yuyutsu,
Surnamed of fights, and set him over all,
Regent, to rule in Parikshita's name
Nearest the throne; and Parikshita king
He crowned, and unto old Subhadra said:
'This, thy son's son, shall wear the Kuru crown,
And Yadu's offspring, Vajra, shall be first
In Yadu's house. Bring up the little prince

Here in our Hastinpur, but Vajra keep
At Indraprasth; and let it be thy last
Of virtuous works to guard the lads, and guide.'

"So ordering ere he went, the righteous king
Made offering of white water, heedfully,
To Vasudev, to Rama, and the rest,—
All funeral rites performing; next he spread
A funeral feast, whereat there sate as guests
Narada, Dwaipayana, Bharadwaj,
And Markandeya, rich in saintly years,
And Tajnavalkya, Hari, and the priests.
Those holy ones he fed with dainty meats
In kingliest wise, naming the name of Him
Who bears the bow; and—that it should be well
For him and his—gave to the Brahmanas
Jewels of gold and silver, lakhs on lakhs,
Fair broidered cloths, gardens and villages,
Chariots and steeds and slaves.

"Which being done,—
O Best of Bhârat's line!—he bowed him low

Before his Guru's feet,—at Kripa's feet,
That sage all honoured,—saying, 'Take my prince;
Teach Parikshita as thou taughtest me;
For hearken, ministers and men of war!
Fixed is my mind to quit all earthly state.'
Full sore of heart were they, and sore the folk
To hear such speech; and bitter spread the word
Through town and country, that the king would go;
And all the people cried, 'Stay with us, Lord!'
But Yudhishthira knew the time was come,
Knew that life passes and that virtue lasts,
And put aside their love.

"So—with farewells
Tenderly took of lieges and of lords—
Girt he for travel, with his princely kin,
Great Yudhishthira, Dharma's royal son.
Crest-gem and belt and ornaments he stripped
From off his body, and for broidered robe
A rough dress donned, woven of jungle-bark;
And what he did—O Lord of men!—so did
Arjuna, Bhima, and the twin-born pair,

Nakula with Sahadev, and she—in grace
The peerless—Draupadí. Lastly these six,
Thou son of Bhârata! in solemn form
Made the high sacrifice of Naishtiki,
Quenching their flames in water at the close;
And so set forth, 'midst wailing of all folk
And tears of women, weeping most to see
The Princess Draupadí—that lovely prize
Of the great gaming, Draupadí the Bright—
Journeying afoot; but she and all the Five
Rejoiced, because their way lay heavenwards,

"Seven were they, setting forth,—princess and king,
The king's four brothers, and a faithful dog.
Those left Hastinapur; but many a man,
And all the palace household, followed them
The first sad stage; and, ofttimes prayed to part,
Put parting off for love and pity, still
Sighing 'A little farther!'—till day waned;
Then one by one they turned, and Kripa said,
Let all turn back, Yuyutsu! These must go.'
So came they homewards, but the Snake-King's child,

Ulûpi, leapt in Ganges, losing them;
And Chitrangâgad with her people went
Mournful to Munipoor, whilst the three queens
Brought Parikshita in.

"Thus wended they,
Pandu's five sons and loveliest Draupadí,
Tasting no meat, and journeying due east;
On righteousness their high hearts bent, to heaven
Their souls assigned; and steadfast trode their feet,
By faith upborne, past nullah, ran, and wood,
River and jheel and plain. King Yudhishthir
Walked foremost, Bhíma followed, after him
Arjuna, and the twin-born brethren next,
Nakula with Sahadev; in whose still steps—
O best of Bhârat's offspring!—Draupadí,
That gem of women, paced; with soft, dark face,—
Beautiful, wonderful!—and lustrous eyes,
Clear-lined like lotus-petals; last the dog,
Following the Pandavas.

"At length they reach
The far Lauchityan Sea, which foameth white

Under Udayachâla's ridge.—Know ye
That all this while Nakula had not ceased
Bearing the holy bow, named Gandiva,
And jewelled quiver, ever filled with shafts
Though one should shoot a thousand thousand times.
Here—broad across their path—the heroes see
Agni, the god. As though a mighty hill
Took form of front and breast and limb, he spake.
Seven streams of shining splendour rayed his brow,
While the dread voice said: 'I am Agni, chiefs!
O sons of Pandu, I am Agni! Hail!
O long-armed Yudhishthira, blameless king,—
O warlike Bhîma,—O Arjuna, wise,—
O brothers twin-born from a womb divine,—
Hear! I am Agni, who consumed the wood
By will of Narayan for Arjuna's sake.
Let this your brother give Gandiva back,—
The matchless bow! the use for it is o'er.
That gem-ringed battle discus which he whirled
Cometh again to Krishna in his hand
For avatars to be; but need is none
Henceforth of this most excellent bright bow,

Gandiva, which I brought for Partha's aid
From high Varuna. Let it be returned.
Cast it herein!'

"And all the princes said,
'Cast it, dear brother!' So Arjuna threw
Into that sea the quiver ever-filled,
And glittering bow. Then led by Agni's light,
Unto the south they turned, and so south-west,
And afterwards right west, until they saw
Dwaraka, washed and bounded by a main
Loud-thundering on its shores; and here—O Best!—
Vanished the God; while yet those heroes walked,
Now to the north-west bending, where long coasts
Shut in the sea of salt, now to the north,
Accomplishing all quarters, journeyed they;
The earth their altar of high sacrifice,
Which these most patient feet did pace around,
Till Meru rose.

"At last it rose! These Six,
Their senses subjugate, their spirits pure,

Wending alone, came into sight—far off
In the eastern sky—of awful Himavan;
And, midway in the peaks of Himavan,
Meru, the Mountain of all mountains, rose,
Whose head is Heaven; and under Himavan
Glared a wide waste of sand, dreadful as death,

"Then, as they hastened o'er the deadly waste,
Aiming for Meru, having thoughts at soul
Infinite, eager,—lo! Draupadí reeled,
With faltering heart and feet; and Bhíma turned,
Gazing upon her; and that hero spake
To Yudhishthira: 'Master, Brother, King!
Why doth she fail? For never all her life
Wrought our sweet lady one thing wrong, I think.
Thou knowest, make us know, why hath she failed?'

"Then Yudhishthira answered: 'Yea, one thing.
She loved our brother better than all else,—
Better than heaven: that was her tender sin,
Fault of a faultless soul; she pays for that.'

"So spake the monarch, turning not his eyes,

Though Draupadí lay dead—striding straight on
For Meru, heart-full of the things of heaven,
Perfect and firm. But yet a little space,
And Sahadev fell down, which Bhíma seeing,
Cried once again: 'O King, great Madri's son
Stumbles and sinks. Why hath he sunk?—so true,
So brave and steadfast, and so free from pride!'

"'He was not free,' with countenance still fixed,
Quoth Yudhishthira; 'he was true and fast
And wise, yet wisdom made him proud; he hid
One little hurt of soul, but now it kills.'

"So saying, he strode on—Kuntí's strong son—
And Bhíma, and Arjuna followed him,
And Nakula, and the hound; leaving behind
Sahadev in the sands. But Nakula,
Weakened and grieved to see Sahadev fall—
His loved twin-brother—lagged and stayed; and next
Prone on his face he fell, that noble face
Which had no match for beauty in the land,—
Glorious and godlike Nakula! Then sighed

Bhíma anew: 'Brother and Lord! the man
Who never erred from virtue, never broke
Our fellowship, and never in the world
Was matched for goodly perfectness of form
Or gracious feature,—Nakula has fallen!'

"But Yudhishthira, holding fixed his eyes,—
That changeless, faithful, all-wise king,—replied:
'Yea, but he erred. The godlike form he wore
Beguiled him to believe none like to him,
And he alone desirable, and things
Unlovely to be slighted. Self-love slays
Our noble brother. Bhíma, follow! Each
Pays what his debt was.'

"Which Arjuna heard,
Weeping to see them fall; and that stout son
Of Pandu, that destroyer of his foes,
That prince, who drove through crimson waves of war,
In old days, with his chariot-steeds of milk,
He, the arch-hero, sank! Beholding this,—
The yielding of that soul unconquerable,

Fearless, divine, from Sakra's self derived,
Arjuna's,—Bhíma cried aloud: 'O king!
This man was surely perfect. Never once,
Not even in slumber when the lips are loosed,
Spake he one word that was not true as truth.
Ah! heart of gold, why art thou broke? O King!
Whence falleth he?'

"And Yudhishthira said,
Not pausing: 'Once he lied, a lordly lie!
He bragged—our brother—that a single day
Should see him utterly consume, alone,
All those his enemies,—which could not be.
Yet from a great heart sprang the unmeasured speech.
Howbeit, a finished hero should not shame
Himself in such wise, nor his enemy,
If he will faultless fight and blameless die:
This was Arjuna's sin. Follow thou me!'

"So the king still went on. But Bhíma next
Fainted, and stayed upon the way, and sank;
Yet, sinking cried, behind the steadfast prince:

'Ah! brother, see! I die! Look upon me,
Thy well-belovèd! Wherefore falter I,
Who strove to stand?'

"And Yudhishthira said:
'More than was well the goodly things of earth
Pleased thee, my pleasant brother! Light the offence,
And large thy virtue; but the o'er-fed flesh
Plumed itself over spirit. Pritha's son,
For this thou failest, who so near didst gain.'

"Thenceforth alone the long-armed monarch strode
Not looking back,—nay! not for Bhíma's sake,—
But walking with his face sèt for the Mount:
And the hound followed him,—only the hound.

"After the deathly sands, the Mount! and lo!
Sakra shone forth,—the God, filling the earth
And heavens with thunder of his chariot-wheels.
'Ascend,' he said, 'with me, Pritha's great son!'
But Yudhishthira answered, sore at heart
For those his kinsfolk, fallen on the way:

'O Thousand-eyed, O Lord of all the Gods,
Give that my brothers come with me, who fell!
Not without them is Swarga sweet to me.
She too, the dear and kind and queenly,—she
Whose perfect virtue Paradise must crown,—
Grant her to come with us! Dost thou grant this?'

"The God replied: 'In heaven thou shalt see
Thy kinsmen and the queen—these will attain—
With Krishna. Grieve no longer for thy dead,
Thou chief of men! their mortal covering stripped,
They have their places; but to thee the gods
Allot an unknown grace: thou shalt go up
Living and in thy form to the immortal homes.'

"But the king answered: 'O thou Wisest One,
Who know'st what was, and is, and is to be,
Still one more grace! This hound hath ate with me,
Followed me, loved me: must I leave him now?'

"'Monarch,' spake Indra, 'thou art now as We,—
Deathless, divine; thou art become a god;
Glory and power and gifts celestial,

And all the joys of heaven are thine for aye:
What hath a beast with these? Leave here thy hound.'

"Yet Yudhishthira answered: 'O Most High,
O Thousand-eyed and Wisest! can it be
That one exalted should seem pitiless?
Nay, let me lose such glory: for its sake
I would not leave one living thing I loved.'

"Then sternly Indra spake: 'He is unclean,
And into Swarga such shall enter not.
The Krodhavasha's hand destroys the fruits
Of sacrifice, if dogs defile the fire.
Bethink thee, Dharmaraj, quit now this beast!
That which is seemly is not hard of heart."

"Still he replied: ''Tis written that to spurn
A suppliant equals in offence to slay
A twice-born; wherefore, not for Swarga's bliss
Quit I, Mahendra, this poor clinging dog,—
So without any hope or friend save me,
So wistful, fawning for my faithfulness,
So agonised to die, unless I help
Who among men was called steadfast and just.'

"Quoth Indra: 'Nay! the altar-flame is foul
Where a dog passeth; angry angels sweep
The ascending smoke aside, and all the fruits
Of offering, and the merit of the prayer
Of him whom a hound toucheth. Leave it here!
He that will enter heaven must enter pure.
Why didst thou quit thy brethren on the way,
Quit Krishna, quit the dear-loved Draupadí,
Attaining, firm and glorious to this Mount
Through perfect deeds, to linger for a brute?
Hath Yudhishthira vanquished self, to melt
With one poor passion at the door of bliss?
Stay'st thou for this, who didst not stay for
them,—
Draupadí, Bhíma?'

"But the king yet spake:
''Tis known that none can hurt or help the dead.
They, the delightful ones, who sank and died,
Following my footsteps, could not live again
Though I had turned,—therefore I did not turn;
But could help profit, I had turned to help.

There be four sins, O Sakra, grievous sins:
The first is making suppliants despair,
The second is to slay a nursing wife,
The third is spoiling Brahmans' goods by force,
The fourth is injuring an ancient friend.
These four I deem not direr than the sin,
If one, in coming forth from woe to weal,
'Abandon any meanest comrade then.'

" Straight as he spake, brightly great Indra smiled;
Vanished the hound;—and in its stead stood there
The Lord of Death and Justice, Dharma's self!
Sweet were the words which fell from those dread lips,
Precious the lovely praise: 'O thou true king!
Thou that dost bring to harvest the good seed
Of Pandu's righteousness; thou that hast ruth
As he before, on all which lives!—O Son,
I tried thee in the Dwaita wood, what time
The Yaksha smote them, bringing water; then
Thou prayedst for Nakula's life—tender and just—
Not Bhíma's nor Arjuna's, true to both,
To Madrî as to Kuntî, to both queens.

Hear thou my word! Because thou didst not mount
This car divine, lest the poor hound be shent
Who looked to thee, lo! there is none in heaven
Shall sit above thee, King!—Bhârata's son,
Enter thou now to the eternal joys,
Living and in thy form. Justice and Love
Welcome thee, Monarch! thou shalt throne with us!'

"Thereat those mightiest Gods, in glorious train,
Mahendra, Dharma,—with bright retinue
Of Maruts, Saints, Aswin-Kumāras, Nats,
Spirits and Angels,—bore the king aloft,
The thundering chariot first, and after it
Those airy-moving Presences. Serene,
Clad in great glory, potent, wonderful,
They glide at will; at will they know and see;
At wish their wills are wrought; for these are pure,
Passionless, hallowed, perfect, free of earth,
In such celestial midst the Pandu king
Soared upward; and a sweet light filled the sky
And fell on earth, cast by his face and form,
Transfigured as he rose; and there was heard

The voice of Narad,—it is he who sings,
Sitting in heaven, the deeds that good men do
In all the quarters,—Narad, chief of bards,
Narad the wise, who laudeth purity,—
So cried he: 'Thou art risen, unmatchèd king,
Whose greatness is above all royal saints.
Hail, son of Pandu! like to thee is none
Now or before among the sons of men,
Whose fame hath filled the three wide worlds, who com'st
Bearing thy mortal body, which doth shine
With radiance as a god's.'

"The glad king heard
Narad's loud praise; he saw the immortal gods,—
Dharma, Mahendra; and dead chiefs and saints,
Known upon earth, in blessèd heaven he saw;
But only those. 'I do desire,' he said,
'That region, be it of the Blest as this,
Or of the Sorrowful some otherwhere,
Where my dear brothers are, and Draupadí.
I cannot stay elsewhere! I see them not!'

"Then answer made Purandará, the God:

'O thou compassionate and noblest One!
Rest in the pleasures which thy deeds have gained.
How, being as are the Gods, canst thou live bound
By mortal chains? Thou art become of Us,
Who live above hatred and love, in bliss
Pinnacled, safe, supreme. Son of thy race,
Thy brothers cannot reach where thou hast climbed!
Most glorious lord of men, let not thy peace
Be touched by stir of earth! Look! this is Heaven.
See where the saints sit, and the happy souls,
Siddhas and angels, and the gods who live
For ever and for ever.'

"'King of gods,'
Spake Yudhishthira, 'but I will not live
A little space without those souls I loved.
O Slayer of the demons! let me go
Where Bhíma and my brothers are, and she,
My Draupadí, the princess with the face
Softer and darker than the Vrihat-leaf,
And soul as sweet as are its odours. Lo!
Where they have gone, there will I surely go.'"

THE ENTRY INTO HEAVEN.

[From the *Swargárohana Parva* of the *Mahábhárata.*]

—o—

To Narayen, Lord of lords, be glory given,
To Queen Saraswati be praise in heaven;
Unto Vyâsa pay the reverence due,—
So may this story its high course pursue.

THEN Janmejaya said: "I am fain to learn
How it befell with my great forefathers,
The Pandu chiefs and Dhritarashtra's sons,
Being to heaven ascended. If thou know'st,—
And thou know'st all, whom wise Vyâsa taught,—
Tell me, how fared it with those mighty souls?"
Answered the sage: "Hear of thy forefathers—

Great Yudhishthira and the Pandu lords—
How it befell. When thus the blameless king
Was entered into heaven, there he beheld
Duryodhana, his foe, throned as a god
Amid the gods; splendidly sate that prince,
Peaceful and proud, the radiance of his brows
Far-shining like the sun's; and round him thronged
Spirits of light, with Sádhyas,—companies
Goodly to see. But when the king beheld
Duryodhana in bliss, and not his own,—
Not Draupadí, not Bhíma, nor the rest,—
With quick-averted face and angry eyes
The monarch spake: 'Keep heaven for such as these,
If these come here! I do not wish to dwell
Where he is, whom I hated rightfully,
Being a covetous and witless prince,
Whose deed it was that in wild fields of war
Brothers and friends by mutual slaughter fell,
While our swords smote, sharpened so wrathfully
By all those wrongs borne wandering in the woods:
But Draupadí's the deepest wrong, for he—
He who sits there—haled her before the court,

Seizing that sweet and virtuous lady—he!—
With grievous hand wound in her tresses. Gods,
I cannot look upon him! Sith 'tis so,
Where are my brothers? Thither will I go!'

"Smiling, bright Narada, the Sage, replied:
'Speak thou not rashly! Say not this, O King!
Those who come here lay enmities aside.
O Yudhishthira, long-armed monarch, hear!
Duryodhana is cleansed of sin; he sits
Worshipful as the saints, worshipped by saints
And kings who lived and died in virtue's path,
Attaining to the joys which heroes gain
Who yield their breath in battle. Even so
He that did wrong thee, knowing not thy worth,
Hath won before thee hither, raised to bliss
For lordliness, and valour free of fear.
Ah, well-belovèd Prince! ponder thou not
The memory of that gaming, nor the griefs
Of Draupadí, nor any vanished hurt
Wrought in the passing shows of life by craft
Or wasteful war. Throne happy at the side

Of this thy happy foeman,—wiser now;
For here is Paradise, thou chief of men!
And in its holy air hatreds are dead.'

"Thus by such lips addressed, the Pandu king
Answered uncomforted: 'Duryodhana,
If he attains, attains; yet not the less
Evil he lived and ill he died,—a heart
Impious and harmful, bringing woes to all,
To friends and foes. His was the crime which cost
Our land its warriors, horses, elephants;
His the black sin that set us in the field,
Burning for rightful vengeance. Ye are gods,
And just; and ye have granted heaven to him:
Show me the regions, therefore, where they dwell,
My brothers, those, the noble-souled, the strong,
Who kept the sacred laws, who swerved no step
From virtue's path, who spake the truth, and lived
Foremost of warriors. Where is Kuntî's son,
The hero-hearted Karna? Where are gone
Sátyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, with their sons?
And where those famous chiefs who fought for me,

Dying a splendid death? I see them not.
O Narada, I see them not! No King
Draupada! no Viráta! no glad face
Of Dhrishtaketu! no Shikandina,
Prince of Panchála, nor his princely boys!
Nor Abhimanyu the unconquerable!
President Gods of heaven! I see not here
Radha's bright son, nor Yudhamanyu,
Nor Uttamanjaso, his brother dear!
Where are those noble Maharashtra lords,
Rajas and Rajpoots, slain for love of me?
Dwell they in glory elsewhere, not yet seen?
If they be here, high Gods! and those with them
For whose sweet sakes I lived, here will I live,
Meek-hearted; but if such be not adjudged
Worthy, I am not worthy, nor my soul
Willing to rest without them. Ah! I burn,
Now in glad heaven, with grief, bethinking me
Of those my mother's words, what time I poured
Death-water for my dead at Kurkshetra,—
"Pour for Prince Karna, son!" but I wist not
His feet were as my mother's feet, his blood

Her blood, my blood. O Gods! I did not know,—
Albeit Sakra's self had failed to break
Our battle, where *he* stood. I crave to see
Surya's child, that glorious chief who fell
By Saryasáchi's hand, unknown of me;
And Bhíma! ah, my Bhíma! dearer far
Than life to me; Arjuna, like a god;
Nakula and Sahadev, twin lords of war,
With tenderest Draupadí! Show me those souls!
I cannot tarry where I have them not.
Bliss is not blissful, just and mighty Ones!
Save if I rest beside them. Heaven is there
Where Love and Faith make heaven. Let me go!'

"And answer made the hearkening heavenly Ones:
'Go, if it seemeth good to thee, dear son!
The King of gods commands we do thy will.'

"So saying [the Sage went on] Dharma's own voice
Gave ordinance, and from the shining bands
A golden Deva glided, taking hest
To guide the king there where his kinsmen were.

So wended these, the holy angel first,
And in his steps the king, close following.
Together passed they through the gates of pearl,
Together heard them close; then to the left
Descending,—by a path evil and dark,
Hard to be traversed, rugged,—entered they
The 'SINNERS' ROAD.' The tread of sinful feet
Matted the thick thorns carpeting its slope;
The smell of sin hung foul on them; the mire
About their roots was trampled filth of flesh
Horrid with rottenness, and splashed with gore
Curdling in crimson puddles; where there buzzed
And sucked and settled creatures of the swamp,
Hideous in wing and sting, gnat-clouds and flies,
With moths, toads, newts, and snakes red-gulleted,
And livid, loathsome worms, writhing in slime
Forth from skull-holes and scalps and tumbled bones.
A burning forest shut the roadside in
On either hand, and 'mid its crackling boughs
Perched ghastly birds, or flapped amongst the flames,—
Vultures and kites and crows,—with brazen plumes
And beaks of iron; and these grisly fowl

Screamed to the shrieks of Prets,—lean, famished ghosts,
Featureless, eyeless, having pin-point mouths,
Hungering, but hard to fill,—all swooping down
To gorge upon the meat of wicked ones;
Whereof the limbs disparted, trunks and heads,
Offal and marrow, littered all the way.
By such a path the king passed, sore afeared
If he had known of fear, for the air stank
With carrion stench, sickly to breathe; and lo!
Presently, 'thwart the pathway foamed a flood
Of boiling waves, rolling down corpses. This
They crossed, and then the Asipatra wood
Spread black in sight, whereof the undergrowth
Was sword-blades, spitting, every blade, some wretch;
All around poison trees; and next to this,
Strewn deep with fiery sands, an awful waste,
Wherethrough the wicked toiled with blistering feet,
'Midst rocks of brass, red hot, which scorched, and pools
Of bubbling pitch that gulfed them. Last the gorge
Of Kutashála Mali,—frightful gate
Of utmost Hell, with utmost horrors filled.

Deadly and nameless were the plagues seen there;
Which when the monarch reached, nigh overborne
By terrors and the reek of tortured flesh,
Unto the angel spake he: 'Whither goes
This hateful road, and where be they I seek,
Yet find not?' Answer made the Heavenly One:
'Hither, great King, it was commanded me
To bring thy steps. If thou be'st overborne,
It is commanded that I lead thee back
To where the Gods wait. Wilt thou turn and mount?'

"Then (O thou Son of Bhárat!) Yudhishthir
Turned heavenward his face, so was he moved
With horror and the hanging stench, and spent
By toil of that black travel. But his feet
Scarce one stride measured, when about the place
Pitiful accents ran: 'Alas, sweet King!—
Ah, saintly Lord!—Ah, Thou that hast attained
Place with the blessèd, Pandu's offspring!—pause
A little while, for love of us who cry!
Nought can harm *thee* in all this baneful place;
But at thy coming there 'gan blow a breeze

Balmy and soothing, bringing us relief.
O Pritha's son, mightiest of men! we breathe
Glad breath again to see thee; we have peace
One moment in our agonies. Stay here
One moment more, Bhárata's child! Go not,
Thou Victor of the Kurus! Being here,
Hell softens and our bitter pains relax.'

"These pleadings, wailing all around the place,
Heard the King Yudhishthira,—words of woe
Humble and eager; and compassion seized
His lordly mind. 'Poor souls unknown!' he sighed,
And hellwards turned anew; for what those were,
Whence such beseeching voices, and of whom,
That son of Pandu wist not,—only wist
That all the noxious murk was filled with forms,
Shadowy, in anguish, crying grace of him.
Wherefore he called aloud, 'Who speaks with me?
What do ye here, and what things suffer ye?'
Then from the black depth piteously there came
Answers of whispered suffering: 'Karna I,
O King!' and yet another, 'O my Liege,

Thy Bhíma speaks!' and then a voice again,
'I am Arjuna, brother!' and again,
'Nakula is here and Sahadev!' and last
A moan of music from the darkness sighed,
'Draupadí cries to thee!' Thereat broke forth
The monarch's spirit,—knowing so the sound,
Of each familiar voice,—'What doom is this?
What have my well-belovèd wrought to earn
Death with the damned, or life loathlier than death
In Narak's midst? Hath Karna erred so deep,
Bhíma, Arjuna, or the glorious twins,
Or she, the slender-waisted, sweetest, best,
My princess,—that Duryodhana should sit
Peaceful in Paradise with all his crew,
Throned by Mahendra and the shining Gods.
How should these fail of bliss, and he attain?
What were their sins to his, their splendid faults?
For if they slipped, it was in virtue's way,
Serving good laws, performing holy rites,
Boundless in gifts, and faithful to the death.
These be their well-known voices! Are ye here,
Souls I loved best? Dream I, belike, asleep,

Or rave I, maddened with accursèd sights
And death-reeks of this hellish air?'

"Thereat
For pity and for pain the king waxed wroth.
That soul fear could not shake, nor trials tire,
Burned terrible with tenderness, the while
His eyes searched all the gloom, his planted feet
Stood fast in the mid horrors. Well-nigh, then,
He cursed the gods; well-nigh that steadfast mind
Broke from its faith in virtue. But he stayed
Th' indignant passion, softly speaking this
Unto the angel: 'Go to those thou serv'st;
Tell them I come not thither. Say I stand
Here in the throat of hell, and here will bide—
Nay, if I perish—while my well-belov'd
Win ease and peace by any pains of mine.'

"Whereupon, nought replied the shining One,
But straight repaired unto the upper light,
Where Sákra säte above the gods; and spake
Before the gods the message of the king."

"Afterward, what befell?" the Prince inquired.

"Afterward, Princely One!" replied the Sage,
"At hearing and at knowing that high deed
(Great Yudhishthira braving hell for love),
The Presences of Paradise uprose,
Each Splendour in his place,—god Sákra chief;
Together rose they, and together stepped
Down from their thrones, treading the nether road
Where Yudhishthira tarried. Sákra led
The shining van, and Dharma, Lord of laws,
Paced glorious next. O Son of Bhárata,
While that celestial company came down—
Pure as the white stars sweeping through the sky,
And brighter than their brilliance—look! hell's shades
Melted before them; warm gleams drowned the gloom;
Soft, lovely scenes rolled over the ill sights;
Peace calmed the cries of torment; in its bed
The boiling river shrank, quiet and clear;
The Asipatra Vana—awful wood—
Blossomed with colours; all those cruel blades,
And dreadful rocks, and piteous scattered wreck

Of writhing bodies, where the king had passed,
Vanished as dreams fade. Cool and fragrant went
A wind before their faces, as these Gods
Drew radiant to the presence of the king,—
Maruts; and Vasus eight, who shine and serve
Round Indra; Rudras: Aswins; and those Six
Immortal Lords of light beyond our light,
Th' Adityas; Sâdhyas; Siddhas,—those were there,
With angels, saints, and habitants of heaven,
Smiling resplendent round the steadfast prince.

"Then spake the God of gods these gracious words
To Yudhishthira, standing in that place:—
"'King Yudhishthira! O thou long-armed Lord,
This is enough! All heaven is glad of thee.
It is enough! Come, thou most blessèd one,
Unto thy peace, well-gained. Lay now aside
Thy loving wrath, and hear the speech of Heaven.
It is appointed that all kings see hell.
The reckonings for the life of men are twain:
Of each man's righteous deeds a tally true,
A tally true of each man's evil deeds.

Who hath wrought little right, to him is paid
A little bliss in Swarga, then the woe
Which purges; who much right hath wrought, from him
The little ill by lighter pains is cleansed,
And then the joys. Sweet is peace after pain,
And bitter pain which follows peace: yet they,
Who sorely sin, taste of the heaven they miss,
And they that suffer quit their debt at last.
Lo! we have loved thee, laying hard on thee
Grievous assaults of soul, and this black road.
Bethink thee: by a semblance once, dear son!
Drona thou didst beguile; and once, dear son!
Semblance of hell hath so thy sin assoiled,
Which passeth with these shadows. Even thus
Thy Bhíma went a little space t' account,
Draupadí, Krishna,—all whom thou didst love,
Never again to lose! Come, First of Men!
These be delivered and their quittance made.
Also the princes, son of Bhárata!
Who fell beside thee fighting, have attained.
Come thou to see! Karna, whom thou didst mourn,—

That mightiest archer, master in all wars,—
He hath attained, shining as doth the sun;
Come thou and see! Grieve no more, King of Men!
Whose love helped them and thee, and wins its meed.
Rajas and Maharajas, warriors, aids,—
All thine are thine for ever. Krishna waits
To greet thee coming, 'companied by gods,
Seated in heaven, from toils and conflicts saved.
Son! there is golden fruit of noble deeds,
Of prayer, alms, sacrifice. The most just Gods
Keep thee thy place above the highest saints,
Where thou shalt sit, divine, compassed about
With royal souls in bliss, as Hari sits;
Seeing Mándhâta crowned, and Bhagirath,
Daushyanti, Bhárata, with all thy line.
Now therefore wash thee in this holy stream,
Gunga's pure fount, whereof the bright waves bless
All the Three Worlds. It will so change thy flesh
To likeness of th' immortal, thou shalt leave
Passions and aches and tears behind thee there.'

"" "And when the awful Sákra thus had said,
Lo! Dharma spake, — th' embodied Lord of
Right:

"'Bho! bho! I am well pleased! Hail to thee,
Chief!
Worthy, and wise, and firm. Thy faith is full,
Thy virtue, and thy patience, and thy truth,
And thy self-mastery. Thrice I put thee, King!
Unto the trial. In the Dwaita wood,
The day of tempting,—then thou stoodest fast;
Next, on thy brethren's death and Draupadí's,
When, as a dog, I followed thee, and found
Thy spirit constant to the meanest friend.
Here was the third and sorest touchstone, son!
That thou should'st hear thy brothers cry in hell,
And yet abide to help them. Pritha's child,
We love thee! Thou art fortunate and pure,
Past trials now. Thou art approved, and they
Thou lov'st have tasted hell only a space,
Not meriting to suffer more than when
An evil dream doth come, and Indra's beam

Ends it with radiance—as this vision ends.
It is appointed that all flesh see death,
And therefore thou hast borne the passing pangs,
Briefest for thee, and brief for those of thine,—
Bhíma the faithful, and the valiant twins
Nakula and Sahadev, and those great hearts
Karna, Arjuna, with thy princess dear,
Draupadí. Come, thou best-belovèd son,
Blessed of all thy line; bathe in this stream,—
It is great Gunga, flowing through Three Worlds.'

" Thus high-accosted, the rejoicing King
(Thy ancestor, O Liege!) proceeded straight
Unto that river's brink, which floweth pure
Through the Three Worlds, mighty, and sweet, and
praised.
There, being bathed, the body of the King
Put off its mortal, coming up arrayed
In grace celestial, washed from soils of sin,
From passion, pain, and change. So, hand in hand
With brother-gods, glorious went Yudhishthir,
Lauded by softest minstrelsy, and songs

Of unknown music, where those heroes stood—
The princes of the Pandavas, his kin—
And lotus-eyed and loveliest Draupadí,
Waiting to greet him, gladdening and glad.

THE END.

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